

• THE •
TIMBER PIRATE



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THE TIMBER PIRATE

CHARLES CHRISTOPHER JENKINS

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THE TIMBER PIRATE

BY
CHARLES CHRISTOPHER JENKINS



NEW

YORK

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THE TIMBER PIRATE. II

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TO
MY WIFE

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THE TIMBER PIRATE

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PROLOGUE

NIGHT'S sable curtain was soon to fall on the short-lived drama of a Winter day in the Laurentians. The departing sub-arctic sun, in its last pale glory, sent up from the omnipresent whiteness myriads of glistening beams that stabbed the eyes like leaping darts of fire. Of sounds there was oppressive absence. Not even a vagrant breeze sighed in the tree-tops; but at irregular intervals the intense stillness was smitten by the lugubrious "Spon-n-n-n-g!" of some aged tree splitting open to the heart where freezing moisture expanded in its crevices. All life and warmth seemed utterly exterminated in the pre-twilight calm save for the distant Monarch of Day slowly receding from his stark white world of desolation.

Yet even in these desolate wastes Man moved and had his being; for on the trail that wound down from the heights to the northwest there was the ribbonlike tracing of a dog sled and beside it the oval imprints of snowshoes. At a small cleared area in the scrub timber, just above where the trail dipped into a mighty, spruce-bearded ravine, the sled marks and the snowshoe patterns ceased.

On this spot, by a camp fire in the snow, hunched an elderly white man wrapped to his throat in blankets, beard and eyebrows thickly frosted from the vapour of his breath. His face, the wasted face of one who had

endured intense physical suffering, was bereft of tangible expression; his eyes fixed dully on the slow-leaping, soundless flames from which there ascended into the zero-freighted air a wispy, hairlike strand of smoke. Roundabout him were scattered canvas packsacks, rolls of bright coloured woollen blankets, fire-blackened pots and pans, two light chopping axes and a short-barrelled repeating rifle. Nearby, on the trail, a spent and foot-sore string of sled dogs lay flattened in the snow. Noses stretched to the fire, eyes closed and limbs inert, they might be mistaken for dead and frozen things but for the occasional faint heave of their flanks as their trained lungs drew sparingly of the biting ozone.

Of a sudden the deathlike calm was shattered by the whining crack of a high-power rifle. Closer by there was a swish and flap of clumsy wings, and a dowdy, slate-coloured *wesse-ke-jak* circled the camp uttering dismal cries of "Meat—meat—meat!"

Every canine head came to life with a start. The figure in the blankets winced as though struck from behind by an unseen icy fist, doubling forward in a racking fit of coughing that reverberated through the solitudes in listless, unsympathetic echoes. The man desisted with a choking gasp, his frame shaking in a palsy. Weakly he slumped back against a nearby packsack, hands clutching at his heart.

"Laddie," he called in a voice that was pitifully faint, "Laddie—oh, Laddie!"

His arms sagged and went limp by his sides, his breath coming and going in the swift, sibilant gasps of a life flickering out from exhaustion.

A wolf-dog in the sled pack pricked up his pointed ears, and, straining away from his fellows, sniffed weirdly in the direction of the stricken man. The treacherous huskie leaped savagely against his restrain-

ing harness, a low, ominous growl issuing from the ugly curve of his long, trembling jaws. A woolly black-and-tan of the faithful Collie strain gave a snarl of warning; then, with bristles rising on his thick, powerful neck, leaped at the throat of the traitor. That was the signal for a general release of pentup canine irritation. In a trice the whole sled pack was engaged in a furious free-for-all of flying fur and white-flashing fangs.

“Lie down!”

The command came low, deep and vibrant with a faint click of teeth. In electric unison the pack flattened, cowering silent in their places—all but the loyal Collie, which turned with slow-wagging tail and crouching rump, to express its fealty as the scrub of the trail parted and a tall youth of spare but powerful build strode into the camp with the carcass of a young buck deer on his shoulder.

The newcomer flung the deer and his rifle to the snow and rushed to the side of the dying man, applying a pocket flask to his lips while he raised him on an arm with the tenderness of a woman. But the elder one was sinking fast—was beyond human aid.

For a few moments he rallied. “Laddie—thank God—you came,” he murmured weakly. “It is the end—the end of the trail—for me. There is so much—so much left undone, Laddie—so much wrong—an erring old man should undo—but you—you, Alexander, my boy—you won’t forget—the mine—the gold mine—goes to—”

The young man bent close to catch the whispered name.

Suddenly the invalid straightened as though galvanised in a last brief lease of life, eyes fixed on some vision above and beyond his companion.

“Black Jack! Black Jack Carlstone!” He cried it as one who cries from the wells of the heart. “Black Jack,

my one true friend—you—you will see that the boy—you will see that he carries out my will—”

His torso sagged and his head dropped limply on his chest before he finished.

With reverent touch the young man closed the tired old eyes, while his own welled up and there was a suggestion of a stifled sob in his throat. Mutely for some moments he remained on one knee in the snow, stoically still, looking into the face of the dead man as though questioning the cruel vagaries of Fate.

But as quickly his expression changed. Presently, when he arose and strode over to the fire, a hard, uncanny light flickered over his face—a face whose intense pallor accentuated the blackness of his extraordinary eyes. Framed in the close-fitting muskrat cap, it was a face that bespoke undeveloped power, strikingly handsome in its mephistophelian mould and portending a sagacity beyond its years.

He stood with arms outstretched to the setting sun, for the moment transformed to a pagan chieftain, and from his lips there issued the single word, “Kee-am!” which in the Indian means: “Nothing matters!”

“The gold mine goes to—” Slowly he repeated the dead man’s injunction. The lids of his black eyes narrowed until they became slits of flame and the lines of his mouth set close-pressed and cruel.

But when he turned and addressed the corpse his features relaxed and his voice was gutturally soft and musical: “It shall be as you willed, my kindest friend—but, for the present, *the mine is lent to me.*”

The sun, now a great, boiling globe under a fanlike glaze of scarlet, eased down upon the bleak western ranges, bordering their purple-shrouded crests with a narrow edging of brightest gold; hesitated one brief second in fiery farewell, then plunged behind the ragged

rim of the northern world. Night swept with swift stealth across the wilderness, transforming it to a realm of spectrelike shadows.

A solemn hush, like a requiem of Nature for the day that was dead, fell over the forests.

The lone figure by the camp fire bent forward strangely as though gripped by an inward paroxysm.

As he did so, the deeps of the woods vibrated with a long-drawn, unearthly cry that echoed and re-echoed its fearsome notes far in the hills. It had seemed to rise from nowhere, a howl neither human nor bestial, but a demoniac blending of both; half anguished wail, half mocking laughter.

No prowling timber wolf broke the succeeding silence with an answering call. Even the wolf-dog in the sled pack cowered deeper in his snowy bed in whimpering fear.

CHAPTER I

ACEY SMITH

I

LOUIS HAMMOND, picking his way in the rapidly-failing twilight, dodged a pot-hole in the pulp camp's "main street," looked up at the unexpected sound of a woman's voice, and, misplacing a foot, went sprawling into another. He arose bespattered and with ice-cold ooze seeping to his ankles over the tops of his city shoes.

The young man barely checked the exclamation more forceful than polite that rose to his tongue when a lithe, girlish form, close-wrapped to the throat in a light fall coat, stepped out to the road from the shadowy verandah of the building that had been pointed out to him as the office of the superintendent.

A big man in a reefer and high boots laced to the knees followed, but before he gained her side, the woman turned.

"No, I thank you," Hammond heard her decline in a bright voice. "It is only a step down to the dock."

The man bowed deferentially, lifted his narrow-brimmed stetson with a courtliness oddly at variance with his rough garb, followed her with his eyes for a moment, then wheeled and returned to the building.

On the Nannabijou Limits, in the farthest reaches of Lake Superior's wild North Shore, was about the last place on earth Hammond expected to encounter a white woman, especially one whose voice and every movement betokened long association in refined environment. Her

verve and grace were the more apparent to him as she came tripping sure-footedly down through the half-light toward the water-front.

She passed him on the other side of the road, and just then the door of a camp to his right was flung open emitting a widening flood of yellow lamplight that threw them both in relief.

Hammond caught a fleeting glimpse of an oval little face, fascinating in its contour; of a daintily-moulded mouth and chin and fine, high-arched eyebrows traced as with the delicate brush of an artist. He looked into great darkened blue eyes that held startled recognition; saw her lips open in a suppressed gasp, then she hurried on as though fearful he might accost her.

The time, the place and the extremely odd circumstances under which he had last felt the magnetic sway of those eyes beneath the unforgettable brows recurred to him as, with wildly-beating pulse, he stood wiping the mud from his hands and clothes with his pocket-handkerchief.

After her figure merged into the gloom down by the dock he waited, despite the chill that was searching at his damp ankles. Soon he heard subdued voices and the preliminary cough of a marine engine being started. Followed the even *chug-chug* of the motor's exhaust and a moving finger of light from a small marine search-light swept out and felt its way through the channel in the immense field of pulpwood booms that all but filled Nannabijou Bay. Out beyond, the boat headed due west.

Who was the girl, and by what odd coincidence did she reappear in this ungodly place? He wondered. But in the maze of other inexplicable circumstances that had surrounded him since the night of the twenty-third of September when he had accepted his present strange mission, he gave up trying to guess the answer. The

damp, oppressive gloom of a Northern Ontario pulp camp after sundown is not contributive to romancing and Hammond had pressing business in hand.

He crossed the road and knocked at the door of the superintendent's office.

II

"Come in!"

The command came clear and loud with an odd vibrating quality in its not inhospitable note.

The room which Hammond entered, an office in the fore of the superintendent's living and sleeping quarters, presented a scene of orderly confusion. Its desks were littered with newspapers, magazines and typewritten flimsies, and on its wall shelves sprawled reference books, encyclopedias, dictionaries and thumb-worn volumes of the classics.

The place struck Hammond as not being unlike the work-rooms of free-lance writing men he had known. But the one occupant, a tall, magnificently set-up figure of a man, was obviously not of the type that put their dreams on paper, but live them.

He barely glanced up when Hammond entered.

The visitor, awaiting recognition, was struck by the conscious power and subtle craftiness that lurked in the pale, exotic features of the other. Stratagem, deep and super-capable, might be read in the eyes, black as night, over which the lids compressed ever so faintly now in a dreamy, faraway gaze. Wide, coldly-moulded temples, under close-cropped, crisp black hair, surmounted a face not to be put out of memory once even casually visualised, and the whole bespoke a mind that, one sensed, worked a dual lightning shift, analysing and sifting its impressions ever in advance of action and word. The lower features narrowed symmetrically to the alert, square-set chin; spare beneath the rounded prominence of the cheek-

bones, with a sensitive mouth that could compress thin-lipped with a flicker in its half-smile that was cruel as sin.

The superintendent arose and walked slowly over to a desk and tossed down the limp-covered encyclopedia volume he had been perusing, then he turned and studied Hammond queerly, quite as one might study an inanimate object while in the depths of a mental problem, only this man's eyes held a ghostly, diabolical light.

"Mr. Hammond, what do you know about aphasia?" was his startling first question.

"Not a great deal," replied Hammond seeking to retain an unsurprised outwardness. "Refers to loss of identity or something of that sort. That encyclopedia ought to—"

"That being so," cut in the other, seeming to return to actual surroundings, "will you please be seated and tell me what's on your mind. Smoke?"

Hammond lifted a cigarette from the other's case. "You are Mr. A. C. Smith, the superintendent?"

"Acey Smith will do—out here."

"As you seem to already know, my name is Hammond. I came looking for a job."

"A job?" He swept Hammond's raiment with his scornful eyes. "What's so suddenly gone wrong with the world of white collars and derby hats?"

"I brought this letter of introduction from Hon. J. J. Slack, M.P."

"Well." Acey Smith grunted amusedly, tore open the envelope and merely glanced at the contents. He turned to Hammond with a trace of a sneer playing about his mouth. "Indicates I'm not to bother trying to find out what you're wanted for and to slap you on the pay-roll at a hundred a month and found."

Hammond stifled indignant surprise. "I suppose you have something I can do?"

"Do?" There was something like a hiss in Acey Smith's half-laugh. "Take in the scenery, I'd suggest. There's a devil of a lot of it going to waste hereabouts."

"There's a mistake somewhere, Mr. Smith. I didn't come out here to loaf, but to tackle a job and earn the money."

The other smiled in better-natured scorn. "Say, Hammond," he derided, "what are you trying to put over on a poor, benighted bush superintendent? You know as well as the scribe angel knows that Old Man J.J. isn't forking you out the North Star's good money for what you're *going to do*, but for what you've *done*."

Hammond, remembering a warning, became cautious. "Nevertheless," he persisted, "I would at least like to make a show of earning the money."

"That's better," approved Acey Smith. "Tell me what you did for a living before J.J. tucked you out here."

Again Hammond felt the need of being guarded before those black, soul-searching eyes. "Lawyer," he prevaricated.

"Full-fledged?"

"No, student."

"H'm, hard-boiled is the only kind I could use. Oh, well, if you find it hard to keep your mind occupied you might camouflage as an extra check with the pole-counting squad. But your principal business, young man, will be doing as you damned well please, except when you get explicit orders to do otherwise.

"By the way," in a more friendly tone, "how was J.J. looking when you last saw him?"

"Pretty fit, though he seemed worried."

"Politics is a hell of a game, isn't it?" pronounced Acey Smith. "But you had better be turning in; you look mussed up and tired. You bunk with the head cook in the little shack next door up. First thing in the morning

slip over to the camp store and get a bush outfit. Those parlour duds of yours are high-sign invitations to the 'flu,' and we don't encourage funerals."

Hammond thanked him, said good-night and turned to leave the room. His hand was on the door-latch when Acey Smith seemed to glide through the air to his side. He felt his wrist seized in a grip of steel.

"Spy!"

It came a hissing accusation that sent Hammond's hot blood to his head. He flung the other free of him. "No, damn you," he answered fiercely, "and I'm not a timber wolf either!"

He could not have explained what inspired him to say that, but at the words, Acey Smith cowered back as one might from the clinging clout of a logging whip. Hammond did not know that a man's face could at one moment hold so much of evil as leaped at him from Smith's. His head jerked back and the eyes that darted fire at Hammond were no longer the eyes of a human being. The taut lips bared back from the even white teeth in a hateful snarl; then Acey Smith's hands went up to his face convulsively, the palms cupping his lower features.

He whirled on a heel like an Objibway in a war dance. Next instant when he faced Hammond he was laughing quietly. "We'll drop the play-acting," he said, "and I'll take you up and introduce you to your shack-mate, Sandy Macdougall, the cook."

"You are *sure* I am not a spy?"

"I am satisfied you are not what I feared for your own welfare you might have been. Let's go."

But the cook had turned in and was snoring raucously when they reached his quarters, a substantial log shack that stood directly opposite the huge dining-camp. Four bunks were built into the further wall of the one-room interior, each equipped with a mattress and any amount

of dark-grey blankets. The place was dimly illuminated by a sullen fire that gave out fitful, subdued cracklings in the little sheet-iron heater banked for the night with green wood.

Acey Smith lighted a wall lamp. Only one of the bunks was occupied, so Acey Smith directed Hammond to the other lower, bade him good-night and left abruptly.

III

The young man did not immediately retire in spite of his fatigue. Instead, he sat down by the stove, lit his pipe and tried mentally to propound something tangible out of the hodge-podge of mystery that had surrounded him since the night of September the twenty-third when he had allowed himself to be pitch-forked into a commission without definite instructions as to how he was to act or whom he was to accept as friends or enemies. Surely the whole world had not gone mad since that hour; there must be a sane method in the whole thing somewhere, but try as he could, cudgel his imagination as he might, he could build up no theory that was at all satisfying.

Then, after he retired, came memory of the fearsome visage of Acey Smith when he had flung him off over there at the door of his office. That was no "play-acting" as Smith had tried to pass it off. For the moment the man had been in deadly earnest, Hammond was sure of that.

But a pair of great startled, blue eyes under fine, high-arched eyebrows, came to drive all other haunts of the night away. Those eyes seemed to speak at him out of the shadows, and the fear in them took him back again to the night of the twenty-third when Fate had literally seized him by the scruff of the neck, yanked him out of a commonplace groove in life and tossed him into a vortex of baffling intrigue and mystery.

CHAPTER II

A STRANGE PACT ON A TRAIN

I

ON the night of September twenty-third, Louis Hammond had been train-bound from Saskatoon east. The transcontinental on which he was travelling had long since passed the Saskatchewan and Manitoba boundaries and was thundering over the muskegs and through the rock-cuts in the great wilderness of the Ontario divide. While the porter was making up his berth, Hammond sought the smoker, but it happened that a garrulous traveller was there holding forth on how the league of nations should have disposed of things to bring about eternal peace, and the young man fled as he might have from the deadly presence of smallpox.

He passed on to the next coach, a compartment and parlour car. The little smoker there promised peace and quiet. In it there sat alone a spare grey little man with a cadaverous face, who looked up from the book in his lap and gazed interestedly at Hammond. The latter lit his pipe and taking a seat in the opposite corner beside the window peered into the moon-bathed night and out over the shadowy wastes to the ragged ranges, where fitful wisps of ground aurora seemed to race with the train like wild ghouls of the night startled from their eeries by this mad, man-made thing tearing through the solitudes.

"Wild country, isn't it?"

The voice of the little grey man startled Hammond

from his reverie. "It is, magnificently so," he replied. "There is something in its very hostile majesty that fascinates me immensely."

"Yes? Easterner, I suppose?"

"Not exactly." Hammond laughed. The other's geniality drew him out of his mood. "You see, I've been a westerner too, and right here I feel sort of neutral."

The little grey man laughed with him, a low, sociable cackle. "Still," he pursued, "I'd wager you're not a travelling man."

"No," a bit wearily. "Newspaper man—ex-newspaper man, I hope."

The announcement seemed to agitate the little man more than such a commonplace announcement should. He was silent a moment while he brought forth a silver card-case. He lifted a bit of pasteboard from it, scrutinised it through his glasses, hesitated as though about to replace it in the card-case, then quite deliberately passed it to Hammond, who took it in at a glance:—

EULAS DALY
UNITED STATES CONSUL,
KAM CITY, ONTARIO, CAN.

Hammond drew out one of his own cards from a vest-pocket and reciprocated. The other still seemed needlessly perturbed. He spoke up at last as though it had cost him some effort to select a tactful opening: "And so you've quit the fourth estate, Mr. Hammond?"

"I intend to; that is, if I can otherwise earn a decent

livelihood. I've had five years of the living-ghost world and I want to get clear of its grind and live things for awhile."

"So—that is it? Quite natural too." Mr. Daly seemed to be feeling his way, syllable by syllable. "Do you know, it is almost providential that you should have come in here at this moment, Mr. Hammond."

"Yes?"

"It's this way—you see: I just a few moments ago left a party who is privately seeking the services of a man of your particular type—and he wants him right away."

"A newspaper publisher?" wryly.

"No—no, not a publisher. By George, I'll bring him here to meet you. What do you say?"

"Hold on," exclaimed Hammond detaining him. "What is the job and who is the man?"

"Your first question I cannot answer, because I do not definitely know myself," replied the American consul. "But you have just hinted to me that you would like to play a part in big things, and if there's one man on the continent who holds that opportunity for you in the hollow of his hand it is Norman T. Gildersleeve."

The little grey man stood in the green-curtained entrance of the smoker, an expectant twinkle in his grey eyes. "What do you say?" he reiterated.

"Go ahead," agreed Hammond. "There can be no harm in meeting him anyway."

After Eulas Daly had gone, Hammond kept turning the name over and over in his mind: Gildersleeve—Norman T. Gildersleeve? Where had he read or heard that name before? Somehow it seemed connected with big business and stock market reports. Ten to one he was looking for a private secretary, a biographer or a publicity agent. Well, any one of those things wouldn't be

so bad, and it would be a change from the exacting grind of the daily newspaper where one was always behind the scenes of big things in process, but never, never quite a part of them. Hammond was twenty-five, the age of limitless discontent, alone in the world and intensely ambitious.

But he was far from guessing the extraordinary nature of the proposition that was about to be put up to him.

II

"Mr. Gildersleeve wishes to see you alone in his stateroom."

Hammond noted that much of the previous enthusiasm had gone from the little consul's manner. His tone now was businesslike, matter-of-fact. No doubt, conjectured Hammond, he had hoped to be a party to the interview he had been instrumental in bringing about.

At the door of Gildersleeve's stateroom, Hammond shook the hand of Eulas Daly with a word of thanks for the interest he had volunteered in the matter. "I'll see you later and tell you all about it," he said, a promise, which, for unexpected reasons, he never kept.

Hammond found Gildersleeve with a litter of papers and documents scattered about him and more protruding from the open jaws of a travelling-bag. He was the cut of a typical captain of big business; middle-aged, iron-grey, with a keen, cold face and the drift of a busy career stamped all over his personality. Two tiny spots, livid white, one below either eye, lent rather a sinister tone to his face, especially when his brilliant dark eyes, set too close to the hawklike nose, were looking straight at you. At first glance, those two marks appeared to be birth-marks, but closer scrutiny disclosed them to be scars.

He did not offer his hand at first; just favoured the younger man with a glance that was as swift as it was penetrating, then turned the document on the little leaf-table before him face down and motioned his visitor to a seat. When he spoke, Hammond felt an electric urge to be brief and to the point.

"Mr. Daly has told me what he knows of you," he opened. "Now, will you kindly oblige me with such detail as you think important about yourself and your capabilities?"

Hammond's training had disciplined him in the terse use of language. He told it all in less than ten minutes' time.

Gildersleeve appraised him keenly, interestedly. "Good," he approved. "You'll no doubt do, provided you care to accept what I have to offer you. In any case, can I expect you to regard this interview as strictly confidential?"

"You can," replied Hammond simply. "As you no doubt know, such a promise from a newspaperman is regarded as sacred."

"Then we'll get down to business. Would you, for instance, be prepared to undertake an assignment, entailing little effort beyond strict caution and secrecy, without being too inquisitive as to what its objects were?"

"That would depend on a number of things," cautiously suggested the younger man. "It would have to be distinctly understood it was clean and above-board."

"The moral side of it need not for a moment worry you," smiled Gildersleeve. "You will be asked to do nothing that would conflict with your standards of honour, however strict they may be. In fact, in this particular case, it would be best for you to avoid even the appearance of trickery."

"If I knew more about the nature of the job, Mr. Gil-

dersleeve, I could better judge my capabilities of taking hold."

"Your newspaper training in mixing with men, combined with a close-mouthed attitude will carry you through," assured the other. "I'm not saying there will be no risks, but such risks will be largely contingent upon your own shrewd behaviour."

Gildersleeve gazed at the window for a silent moment, then continued: "The proposition in brief is this: You are to secure for yourself a position of a clerical nature; say pole-counter, time-keeper or office-assistant, with the North Star Towing and Contracting Company, out at their camps on the Nannabijou pulpwood limits, located about twenty miles south-east of the Port of Kam City, on the North Shore of Lake Superior. You are to hold whatever job you select till I communicate with you, and, while you are engaged at it you are to forget that you have been a newspaper man, maintaining absolute silence to all concerned as to your past and as to why I sent you out there. On these two points, I'd like to repeat with emphasis, *you must be particularly cautious*.

"Now, as to remuneration: You will be paid by me personally on the completion of the contract at the rate of one thousand dollars a month for such time as you put in in addition to such salary as you draw for your work from the company operating the limits. Afterwards, if you point up to my expectations, I'll be in a position to offer you a berth that will perhaps be more congenial and unclouded by the mystery that must for the time being surround this one.

"What do you think about it, Mr. Hammond?"

Hammond was for the moment lost for an answer. This high-salaried offer, though it distinctly appealed to his adventuring spirit, took him off his feet and the con-

cealed object of his mission at the pulpwood limits made him hesitate.

"I am not expected to spy on any one?" he insisted.

"I have assured you there will be nothing underhand about it," Gildersleeve reminded him.

"There is, however, a possibility I might not succeed in securing a position with the contracting company."

"There is such a possibility—a remote one, but the way will be made easy for you. At Kam City you will make personal application to Hon. J. J. Slack, M.P., president of the North Star Towing and Contracting Company, presenting to him a letter of introduction I will furnish you with."

The train slowed down to a grinding stop at a small flag station. It was but a moment till it was in motion again.

"I'll take it," decided Hammond.

Before Gildersleeve could reply there came a light, insistent tapping at the door of the stateroom. A coloured porter entered, bearing a sealed envelope, passed it to Gildersleeve with a flash of very white teeth and retired.

Gildersleeve ripped the message from the envelope, glanced at its contents and pushed the button at his elbow.

"Porter," he requested when the latter re-appeared, "how long does the train stop at Moose Horn Station?"

"Twenty minutes, sah. We take on watah there, sah."

"Very well, porter," acknowledged Gildersleeve, passing the black man a tip.

He reached for pen and railway stationery, and while he wrote hurriedly said: "This note to J. J. Slack will act as the *open sesame* to the job, Mr. Hammond. You may read it before I seal it."

Hammond took the proffered sheet and read:—

En Route to Kam City, Sept. 23.

Hon. J. J. Slack, M.P.,
Pres. North Star Co.,
Kam City, Ontario.

My dear Slack:—Am under immediate necessity of finding a berth out in the woods for the bearer, Louis Hammond. Put him on at a clerical job, not too arduous, at a good salary and charge the latter up to my account. Please do so as quietly as possible, as it is highly essential that my connection in this matter should remain absolutely confidential. Yours very truly,
NORMAN T. GILDERSLEEVE.

"Now, Mr. Hammond," Gildersleeve went on as he sealed and addressed the envelope, "we'll consider the matter closed for the present. Sorry for the terrific rush, but there is an emergent matter that presses for my immediate attention."

He arose and grasped the young man's hand. That strong grip was reassuring, but it did not altogether dissipate a presentiment growing on Hammond that he had let himself in for something that was even more potential in its possibilities than it looked to be on the surface. There was no more to be said, however, unless he changed his mind and threw up the whole thing. He had not the slightest desire to do that.

III

Outside the stateroom door, Hammond stopped dead in his tracks. He was looking into a woman's face that was startlingly, unreally beautiful.

She had risen from among the chairs in the drawing-room of the coach, a dazzling apparition with great wonder eyes under finely-pencilled, high-arched brows. For the moment he was conscious he was staring stupidly, unable to help himself; then her dark-fringed eyelids dropped and the faintest traces of a vagrant smile lit up her divinely-moulded features.

Hammond swung hastily down the aisle. Quite in a whirl he pitched into the smoker. The train slowed down under a sudden shuddering of air-brakes.

He looked out the window. A sign-board on the tiny frame building beyond the equally diminutive platform told him it was Moose Horn Station.

A stateroom door opened somewhere and he heard a passenger hurry along the aisle, out of the coach and down the train steps. Next instant he saw Norman T. Gildersleeve, the man he had just been talking to, appear on the station platform, wearing a light overcoat and carrying a small black bag. Gildersleeve looked swiftly about the area where the dull station lamp-light and the glow from the car windows fell, then hurried around the side of the station building and disappeared in the shadows.

He had barely gone when another form seemed to rise out of the shadows near the train somewhere, a tall, graceful figure of a woman in sable furs and wearing a large picture hat. As if Hammond's stare had attracted her, she turned and glanced for a fleeting instant at the car window. Hers was a savage, dark beauty with eyes so intense they glowed like luminous discs of blackness in the shadowy light.

The woman went rapidly to the station, passed in the door, remained a moment, re-appeared and returned down the platform to the train.

Hammond strode out to the vestibuled platform of the coach. He watched the station area closely for Norman T. Gildersleeve's return. But Gildersleeve did not come back.

The engine's bell sounded.

Hammond thought of his berth, but some movement within drew his gaze through the glass door of the compartment coach. The door of Gildersleeve's stateroom

was open, and the little grey man, Eulas Daly, passed in, closing the door behind him. Hammond was sure Gildersleeve was not with him and that he could not have preceded him.

The young man was about to leave when a silent form emerged from the shadow near the coach door. It was the wonderful girl he had seen in the drawing-room, but there was great perplexity in her face now. The train was rapidly accumulating the even roar of its maximum speed.

The girl looked back and her eyes met Hammond's beyond the glass of the platform door. Her hand went to her lips as though to stifle a cry that trembled there. The fright registered upon her face went to him like the stab of a knife. Plainly, he was the cause of that fright. Mystified, and somehow deeply hurt, he drew back into the shadows and she fled like one fearing for her life.

With confusion still upon him, Hammond hurried to his berth in the pullman.

CHAPTER III

"HONOUR SINKS WHERE COMMERCE LONG PREVAILS"

I

NEXT morning the events of the previous evening all seemed to Hammond like a hazy dream. Only the sealed letter from Gildersleeve to Hon. J. J. Slack, M.P., president of the North Star Towing and Contracting Company, smacked of tangibility, for he saw nothing further of Gildersleeve, the girl with the high-arched eyebrows or even the U.S. consul, Eulas Daly. His sense of good form prevented him from prowling back through the compartment coach, and he was really pressed for time to dress and breakfast before the train pulled into Kam City.

His first experience was a disappointment. At the head office of the North Star Company he was informed that Hon. J. J. Slack was away at the Dominion capital on business, but would possibly be back before noon of the following day. He had therefore a wait of two days in the lakeport city.

Hammond improved his time by paying a visit to the sites of two enormous pulp and paper mills under course of construction near the water front. There was a curious rivalry of big interests told of there. The young man was the more interested on learning that one of these plants, the Kam City Pulp and Paper mill, was to derive its supply of pulp poles almost exclusively from the Nannabijou Limits, the largest in all the North, a government block on which the Kam City Company had secured

conditional rights to the timber that very summer after a long legal battle with competitors and the signing of a hard and fast agreement with the Ontario government that their mill must be running to full capacity, manufacturing paper from wood cut on the Nannabijou Limits by October the twenty-third of that very year. In case they were not in a position to do so from any cause whatsoever they stood to lose all rights to the timber.

The stories which Hammond gained from various sources regarding this situation were conflicting and at best rather incoherent. Out of it all he gathered that it was the result of a war between two highly capitalised organisations to gain the supremacy. It seemed that originally both the North Star Company and the Kam City Company were applicants for the cutting rights on the Nannabijou, and because a pledge had been made by the government during an election campaign that not one pole might be cut and carried away from the limits unless it were manufactured into paper in Kam City, both companies, to prove their good faith, had purchased sites in Kam City and had started the building of their mills before their applications went in. The North Star Company was finally awarded the rights to the limits on an explicit agreement that they were to have their mill in full operation the following October. There was an additional stipulation that in order to renew their yearly rights on October the twenty-third they must commence the installation of their machinery by June the first. This latter clause, it was said, was added because of the North Star's reputation for trickery, the government being determined that whoever cut the poles on the Nannabijou must be making paper from them on the specified date, October the twenty-third.

The North Star had immediately commenced cutting operations on the limits. The construction of their mill

too was rushed, but June rolled around without them having received any machinery to install in it. On the other hand, the Kam City Company, who had gone on with their mill just the same as if they held the contract, were getting their machinery on the ground and had actually commenced the installation of some of it. The Kam City Company immediately made a second application for the cutting rights on the limits, claiming that the North Star Company had forfeited theirs through non-performance of contract. Then there ensued a battle royal in the courts and before the legislature.

There were weeks of lobbying, during which Slack, the president of the North Star, and a bevy of lawyers representing that company endeavoured to hold the cutting rights and gain an extension of time till the North Star completed their mill, making the claim, which may or may not have been true, that they could not secure delivery of the paper-making machinery on order on account of the steel famine which then existed. But the provincial government obstinately stood out for the terms of the agreement. Slack was seeking to bring higher political pressure to bear from Ottawa when the Kam City Company's application was granted, their cutting rights to obtain from the date the North Star's expired, October twenty-third, conditional that their mill should be in full operation on that date. In order that they might have wood to grind, an additional fiat was issued constraining the North Star to make delivery of their cut on the limits to the mill of the Kam City Company, at a price to be fixed by a commission, in sufficient time for the latter to commence operations, and in sufficient quantities to keep the said mills running during the subsequent winter months. On the twenty-third, the North Star were to surrender the limits to the Kam City organisation.

Then a strange thing happened. The North Star Company suddenly changed their tactics, bowed to the decree of the government and withdrew all their suits in the courts of law. Almost simultaneously, a number of members, who were known to be under the thumb of the North Star, brought down a rider to be inserted in the agreement with the Kam City Company to the effect that if the latter company, for any cause whatsoever, failed to have their mill in full operation by October the twenty-third and every prospect of continuous operation from then on, their rights should be cancelled and the same rights revert to the original holders, the North Star Company, the latter in such a case to get an extension of time for the installation of their machinery at their mill.

The Kam City Company's lawyers made a brilliant battle for relief from this rider, which, they pointed out, would nullify their hard-won rights in case of unforeseen exigencies or accident. The North Star's representatives pointed out that the North Star Company had had their rights cancelled on this very basis, and what had been considered fair treatment of one company should be fair to another. The government, tired of haggling and secretly fearing to further antagonise the powerful North Star Company, made the rider law which the Kam City Company must agree to live up to.

Thus was brought about the curious situation wherein the North Star Company, with a mill of their own practically completed except for the installation of machinery, were forced to cut and deliver wood from the Nannabijou for their rival. On the other hand, the Kam City Company had also to accept this system for the time being whether they liked it or not. It was obvious that they did so because they could not help themselves; they had to have millions of poles ready for immediate delivery

at their city docks in time to live up to their agreement, and the North Star Company owned all the available tugs and machinery so necessary to rush the poles to the mill site.

For once it was believed that a coup had been put over on the wily North Star Company, but they took their medicine without murmur, and not only went on with the cutting and booming of poles at the limits as before, but rushed the completion of their huge pulp mill building. People wondered what they hoped to do with it, because the Nannabijou Limits now secured by the Kam City Company would give the latter the full advantage in paper-making competition, not only because they were by far the largest limits in the North, but because they were drained by the mighty Nannabijou River and its tributaries, simplifying the matter of transporting the poles to the lake-front from far inland. It was true that three other limits on the North Shore were controlled by companies believed to be subsidiaries of the North Star, but they were infinitely small in area compared with the Nannabijou forests.

At any rate, the two big pulp and paper mills were on their way and Kam City was getting the benefit of construction work that would total somewhere in the neighbourhood of six or seven million dollars, and the public, as usual, was mostly concerned with the wealth immediately in sight.

II

Hammond incidentally gathered from what he heard here and there that Hon. J. J. Slack, M.P., president of the North Star Company, was a big man in Kam City, but he also discovered a general impression abroad that he was really a figure-head—that his every move in the commercial world was dictated by a power behind, mys-

terious as it was ingenious and powerful. Even the policies which he espoused in the House of Commons were attributed to master minds somewhere back of the scenes. No one had ever been able to place a finger on the source of his inspiration, but wiseacre socialist leaders maintained it was that much-abused, vague quantity known as "the big interests," and the mob were contented to accept it as a good enough theory.

Hon. J. J. Slack, M.P., who held a place in the cabinet at Ottawa without portfolio, it seemed, was a tricky politician, a hail fellow and well met—and nothing more. Before his election to the Commons he was a struggling barrister whose battle for a mere existence was a case of Greek meet Greek; afterwards, he suddenly blossomed forth as president of the North Star Towing and Contracting Company, which those on the inside claimed was the parent of some twenty-seven flourishing subsidiary enterprises, including a fleet of grain-carrying freighters on the upper lakes, a grain storage trust operating elevators half way across the continent, a fur-trading company that had gradually dominated the adjacent districts to the exclusion of all rivals and a string of powerful newspapers in various cities and towns all the way from the head of the great lakes to the Pacific coast.

The North Star Towing and Contracting Company and its leading subsidiaries had at one time and another been accused of the boldest commercial piracies, gigantic briberies and glaring steals. If there was a big campaign "barrel" in evidence during an election it was usually set down as North Star money—and always, it seemed, the men the North Star backed had the most votes when the ballot counting was over. But never did the North Star Company or its satellites appear in the courts of law as defendants or face a commission of inquiry. There were settlements of a quiet nature—if

there had to be. They wielded a long arm of retribution when their self-appropriated privileges were interfered with—wielded it with such cunning and far-reaching effect that even powerful rival corporations and high government officials learned, not without cost to themselves at times, it was the better part of wisdom not to stand in their way.

Whose money financed this sinister business only the company's bankers knew, and what they knew they did not tell. The business seemed in some mysterious manner to run itself—so successfully that it reached out and dominated what it pleased, with an uncanny penchant for stamping out rivals and smashing all opposition in its path. Its progress and expansion had a certainty and a swiftness of a thing on the tables of destiny. Its sub-managers were all reputed to be clever rogues, deliberately chosen because past performances had given proof that a working conscience was the least of their moral burdens. Strange to say, none of them had even been known to double-cross the North Star subsidiary for which he worked. Perhaps this, in a sense, was due to a knowledge that nowhere else could they secure positions so lucrative or power of a kind such as they wielded under Slack. But more likely there was a deeper reason; a sense of an unseen guiding mind whom none could name but all felt—a power in the background that could make and unmake, could create and destroy at its pleasure.

Slack's sudden ascension to command of all the varied industries dominated by the North Star interests was at first lightly taken. Merely a figurehead president appointed for political strategy, every one said. All of which feazed the Hon. J. J. Slack not the least. He went smilingly on his way accumulating millions, quite contented to be under-rated in the matter of personal ability. The executives of the North Star and its sub-

sidiaries soon learned in a quiet but effective manner that Slack's word was law; that, wherever his counsels might come from, he was at all times clothed with absolute executive authority.

The thing that puzzled the gossiping public was why the North Star Company had been so willing to cut and deliver the poles from the Nannabijou Limits for their hated rival, the Kam City Pulp and Paper Mills. With an almost exclusive monopoly on towing and loading equipment, they could have been almost certain of tying up delivery to the Kam City Company for an indefinite period by simply ceasing operations on the Nannabijou till long-drawn-out action in the courts forced them to abide by what was in a legal sense unprecedented action on the part of the government. Instead, the North Star carried on their cutting and booming as before. By many this was looked on as portentous; the North Star's quiet submission was too obvious to be natural and without deeper designs, as was also the fact that, though they had not even yet received their machinery, they were going on with the completion of their pulp and paper mill building. But more ominous than any was the editorial silence of the North Star newspapers on this particular question. From the day that the North Star changed its tactics before the government, the newspapers currently believed to be under control of the North Star never again so much as mentioned the matter of the cutting rights on the Nannabijou Limits.

Goose-bone prophets foresaw the utter elimination of the North Star coming. It was a situation analogous to that of a great general ordering his heaviest guns to cease firing and retire at a time when petty strategists conceive that victory could be gained only by continued attack.

III

Hammond saw plainly enough now that through his deal on the train with Norman T. Gildersleeve he had tumbled in a small way into the vortex of big things, and he had a notion that for the next few weeks at least he was not going to suffer from monotony. Gildersleeve must be in some manner financially interested, but no one with whom Hammond came in contact could throw any light on that phase of the situation. A man named Duff, of Toronto, they said, was president of the Kam City Pulp and Paper Mills, backed by international capital in which American financial interests held control. A man named Norman T. Gildersleeve had at one time been a big factor in the North, but he had long since been driven out of business in Canada by the irrepressible North Star. No, it couldn't be he—he had surely had enough of "bucking" the North Star.

Hammond was bound to find out, if he could do so without arousing suspicion as to his interest in the matter. Perhaps Slack would drop some hint of Gildersleeve's identity when he saw him.

But Slack did no such thing. Hammond was among the first to interview the politician on his return from Ottawa.

Hon. J. J. Slack, M.P., was a big man physically, handsome in a plump, comfortable way, urbane and pleasing of address—almost oily. His face registered acute surprise as he sat across the desk from Hammond in his private office reading Gildersleeve's brief letter of introduction. He actually seemed to be trying to conceal great perturbation, but he made no comment, and to Hammond's adroitly thrown out feelers for information regarding Gildersleeve he made guarded, un-

satisfying replies. All of which is second-nature with a seasoned politician.

He did not call a stenographer, but scrawled out something on a letterhead and sealed it in an official envelope. Then he wrote a couple of words across the face of a card he took from a drawer of his desk and handed both to his visitor.

"I am delighted to comply with Mr. Gildersleeve's request," he observed. "In the envelope is a letter of introduction to Mr. A. C. Smith, superintendent for the North Star Company at the Nannabijou Limits, Mr. Hammond. The card is a pass which will take care of your transportation out on any of the tugs leaving our local docks this afternoon."

He was pleasant and smiling about it, but his abrupt rising from his seat intimated that the interview was at an end. Hammond thanked him for his courtesy and hurried to the dock.

IV

Later that same afternoon a messenger boy entered Slack's private office and delivered to him a sealed yellow envelope. It contained a marconigram in code, which, after some moments of patient study, Slack deciphered as follows:

Be prepared sensational news. Authorise papers print verbatim all despatches signed *Musson*. Keep strict watchout and wire explicit details regarding all strangers seeking to get to limits. (Sgd.) "J.C.X."

Slack's fat hands trembled. His face became red and white by turns like one who has been discovered in a grievous blunder. He jabbed excitedly at a push-button to the side of his desk.

A lean, bespectacled man with a foxlike face responded from the outer office. "You wanted me, Mr. Slack?"

"Yes, Jackson, send a man to the docks right away," cried Slack. "Tell him to look up a fellow named Hammond who has a pass out on the tug and bring him back here to me. Tell him to tell Hammond there's been an oversight and I want to see him right away."

The fox-faced man craned his neck at the south window of the office. "The tug's gone, Mr. Slack," he announced. "She's a mile out in the lake now."

Whereat Jackson discreetly withdrew while the Hon. J. J. Slack, M.P., made the air sing with dark, unparliamentary curses.

CHAPTER IV

"A STOIC OF THE WOODS—A MAN WITHOUT A TEAR"

I

WHEN Acey Smith returned to his office after seeing Hammond to his sleeping quarters the night the latter arrived at the Nannabijou Limits, he sat long by his desk in strange cogitation, his eyes narrowed to brooding slits, his mouth drawn over his even white teeth until it became a long cruel hairline in a face that no longer masked its ruthless craftiness. Acey Smith believed the faculties became most acute after midnight. Most of the problems that arose in the province of his activities were solved in the dead hours of the night. And when a light burned late in Acey's Smith's office—well, there were sometimes orders to execute that proved an unlovely surprise for one or more persons of consequence on the morrow.

Of all the executives of the North Star Towing and Contracting Company and its subsidiaries Acey Smith was the deepest enigma; a man who lived for the most part to himself, kept no counsel with his fellows. Of his antecedents there was little known. He had risen from the obscurity of dear knows where to the post of superintendent for the North Star Company; in fact had been its chief out-of-doors executive since its inception as a one-tug-and-barge salvaging and towing concern. He had seen it rise to a position dominating the marine business of the upper lakes and spread out commercial branches into the lumber limits, the fur terri-

tories, urban manufacturing and even the grain belts of the prairie west. The North Star became the mightiest commercial octopus of the North and the Northwest, but Acey Smith never moved beyond the post of superintendent for the parent company and general over-man of the subsidiaries.

Why this was so not even his brother executives of the North Star enterprises could understand. That he "held cards" with the executives of the company was current belief. Some declared he was more in their confidence than the president, Hon. J. J. Slack himself. Deeper ones sensed some secret personal barrier that precluded his promotion.

In truth, there were times when Acey Smith cursed bitterly a creature that had put a curse upon him through his mother—startled her before he was born with a black curse that stuck.

The Latin races in the cutting gangs steadfastly held Acey Smith was in league with the Evil One, a superstition which gained weight from a tale of old-timers of how he had once broken a Finnish bully of the camps with his bare hands. Smith had gone out to reprimand the Finn for causing a disturbance, whereat the latter made use of a name that is a fighting-word wherever men revere the honour of their parents.

The superintendent's form leaped out of his mackinaw like the unsheathing of a rapier. The giant rushed him with a roar; flailed at him with his great ape-like arms, intending first to knock him to the ground and then stamp and lacerate him with his caulked boots, after a refined custom of victors in back-country encounters of those days.

Instead, the great Finn halted abruptly a few feet from Acey Smith with a queer sound that was half sob, half moan.

The Boss's arms had shot out like flickers of light to the throat and face of the other, and what happened after that would pale the story of the cruellest one-sided prize-fight on record. They carried the Finn away a bleeding, quivering mass with a head that wobbled weirdly on a swollen, distorted neck.

It was the Finn's last fight. Just what happened he never told, and at mention of it he would jabber incoherent things through teeth that chattered like those of one in the grip of the ague. When he recovered sufficiently to get upon his feet, he left camp at a limping run and was never seen in those precincts again.

It was the look upon Acey Smith's face on that occasion that left an indelible impress upon the memory of witnesses—a light of incarnate fury and hate that sat there while he pummelled the other into a pulp. None had ever seen such a baneful gleam on the face of a man, and among those hard-bitten, devil-may-care lumber-jacks there was none who wished to ever look upon its like again.

What the witnesses to that fight had seen in Acey Smith's face was a something that was always there, subdued almost beyond detection in his normal moments, but ever leaping in flickers to his features when powerful impulses were upon him—an all-crushing, sinister thing that seemed to be crying out from within him: "Destroy! Destroy! Destroy!"

That was what Louis Hammond had seen, momentarily, when Acey Smith had gripped his wrist at the door. It had brought upon Hammond an unknown fear that it took all his strength of will to hide.

But now, in the privacy of his midnight meditations, conflicting emotions were mirrored in the countenance of the master of the Nannabijou camps. As he sat pondering by his desk the remnants of that evil light leaped

alternately to his eyes only to dissipate in a softer glow that seemed to signal the triumph of some better element of his nature.

Two problems assailed Acey Smith—one the hidden reason for sending Louis Hammond to the limits and the other the haunting eyes of a beautiful woman whose visit to his office earlier in the evening had brought a magical surprise.

It was not that either of their visits was unexpected. He had been apprised of their coming through the North Star's own channels of information. "As for Hammond," he finally deduced, "he's merely a stool-pigeon—nothing more. But for what purpose? There's what must be found out right away."

He picked up Slack's letter of introduction. It was a somewhat different epistle from what he had inferred it was to Hammond:—

Dear A.C.S.—The bearer, one Louis Hammond, has evidently got something on the Big Quarry, who wants us to keep him hidden on the limits at a good salary. It might be a good idea to hang onto him and draw him out. What he knows might be of value to us.

J. J. SLACK

Acey Smith tore the letter into tiny shreds and dropped them into the stove. "Slack," he passed judgment, "has about as much real thinking matter above his eyebrows as a yellow chipmunk."

II

Hammond and Slack were soon out of Acey Smith's thoughts. He paced the floor in slow, thoughtful strides, every now and then pausing to gaze at a certain point near the door. An onlooker would have been amazed at the metamorphosis that had come over the man. The harsh lines had receded from his face and a something

came in their place that in another might have been taken for the light of a tender sentiment.

Memory of a gentle presence gripped him, gripped him with the thrill of a golden song and an abandonment to its witchery that was a back-cry from a youth this man of iron had never lived in its fullness.

In his mental eye he could see her standing as she *had* stood in his doorway, hesitant and waiting for him who was for the moment held too spell-bound to speak. God, what eyes! They had seemed to play into the very soul of him as shafts of the morning sun golden and gladden the dourest recesses of the wilderness hills. This was no toy of a girl, merely pretty and pleasing to the eye. She was a beautiful woman in all the wonderfully potential things that simple phrase conjures in the fancy of a man who has seen the world and what tawdry stuff lies behind much of its glint and glitter. He was totally unprepared for such a discovery; he had never thought of things turning out so. He had listened to her voice as one listens to melody whose reminiscent notes carry him back into a nebula of forgotten things, faint and elusive, yet hauntingly familiar. Yet Acey Smith had never set eyes on this woman before.

She had introduced herself as Miss Josephine Stone, of Calgary, Alta., who had taken up temporary residence on Amethyst Island, a picturesque reef formerly used as a summer resort and situated about a mile and a half northwest of the docks of the Nannabijou Limits. She had come there from the West, accompanied by a woman companion, Mrs. Johnson, in compliance with a letter she had received from Mr. J. C. Eckes, of the North Star Towing and Contracting Company, who had intimated that information of vital interest to her could only be communicated to her sometime within the next few weeks, and, to accommodate her and any companions and ser-

vants she thought necessary to bring with her, a cottage had been prepared for her occupancy on Amethyst Island. A cheque, drawn on the North Star Company, to cover her expenses, had been enclosed with the letter, which enjoined her to the strictest secrecy, but she was directed to call upon Mr. A. C. Smith, superintendent at the limits, at her earliest convenience after she got settled on Amethyst Island. Mr. Smith would see to her welfare till such time as it was possible for her to be put in possession of the information referred to.

"It is all so mysterious," she concluded. "It is more like something you would read about in a book."

"But it is all very real, I assure you, Miss Stone," replied Acey Smith. "Won't you be seated?"

"Oh, I'm afraid I cannot remain long. Mrs. Johnson came over with me from the island and I left her waiting in the motorboat at the dock."

"You find things comfortable and congenial at the island?"

"Very. I think it is such a delightful spot. Just like a holiday for me, and I can get over and back to the city so conveniently in the motorboat provided."

"You would not be averse to remaining there for say, three to four weeks, if necessary?"

"Oh." She had not, evidently, been prepared for such a request. "In the meantime, am I to know what this is all about, Mr. Smith?"

"I am very sorry I am not in a position to fully explain to you what must seem like a very queer proceeding," he answered, "and I can only ask you to be content to await developments."

"But Mr. Eckes—when am I to meet him?"

"J.C.X.?" Acey Smith pronounced it short and in a cautious whisper.

"Yes."

"That would be out of the question."

"But I understood I was to meet him here."

"You have misinterpreted the letter, Miss Stone. Nowhere does it refer to such a meeting."

The girl bit her nether lip. Her eyes flashed dangerously. "If that's the answer," she said coldly, "we may as well end this farce at once. I will return to Calgary to-morrow."

Genuine alarm came into Acey Smith's face. "But, Miss Stone," he cried, "you don't know how much it is in your own interests that you stay—how greatly you would jeopardise matters by leaving!"

"That is just it—I don't know! I feel I have a *right* to know if I am to be asked to remain."

There could be no mistaking the determination in her voice and manner. Plainly she was poignantly disappointed. The superintendent gazed fixedly into space for a silent period. "Give me time," he requested. "Give me time to find out what I may tell you. Will you do that?"

"To-morrow?"

"To-morrow morning, if you say so."

"Shall I call here?"

"No. I will go to the island—with your permission."

"Thank you, Mr. Smith. I will look for you at 10.30."

He accompanied her, hat in hand, to the door. She softly declined his offer of escort to the dock, a declination that left no hurt. She was a Western girl with a Western girl's notions of independence in such matters.

Acey Smith had reluctantly applied himself to another pressing matter with thoughts of her forcing themselves uppermost. Then Hammond had come. Hammond—oh, well, he wanted to forget Hammond and those other things for just now.

In spite of the predicament the girl's ultimatum had apparently placed him in, Acey Smith had pleasure in

anticipating the keeping of that appointment at Amethyst Island on the following day. Before retiring he took from a wardrobe in his private quarters a neatly pressed dark suit of tailor-made clothes and laid it out in his room with fine shoes and immaculate white linen.

Awakening the following morning he sat up in bed, and, gazing at the city garments, laughed a harsh, soulless laugh.

"Fool," he syllabled grimly. "Fool—double-fool!"

He garbed himself in his bush clothes and placed the fine raiment back in the wardrobe.

III

An hour later that morning, in the cook's quarters, Louis Hammond came out of a dreamless sleep and for some moments sat blinkingly trying to adjust himself to his new surroundings. He wasn't so sure now he was going to like his new job or its environment. Used to an active routine, he would many times rather have had some set schedule of duties to perform than be left to find his own means of occupying his time. There was something highly unsatisfactory about the whole thing, and had it not been for the element of mystery that challenged his patience, he would have felt like dropping the assignment and leaving by the first tug for the city.

As if it were an echo of his thoughts, there came the shrill tooting of the incoming morning tug down by the dock. Hammond rolled out of his bunk and ran to the four-paned window of the cabin. The tug had already been docked and snubbed with the despatch characteristic of upper lakes sailormen. The crew, hustling off supplies, paused while a single passenger, a young woman wearing sable furs and a large picture hat, landed. Something familiar about her caused Hammond to watch

by the window while she came leisurely up the camp road.

He started back with a suppressed exclamation as her features became discernible. It was the face of the dark-eyed woman he had seen get off the train at Moose Horn Station in the wake of Norman T. Gildersleeve.

She turned and walked into the office of the superintendent without rapping on the door.

"All our trails seem to lead to Acey Smith's layout," grimly ruminated Hammond as he turned from the window.

Breakfast, however, was uppermost in Hammond's mind at the moment, and, hastily donning his clothes, he hurried over to the dining camp just across the road from his sleeping quarters. He expected a sharp reprimand for being late, but he was met by a genial-faced, auburn-haired young man who introduced himself as his shack-mate, Sandy Macdougall, head cook.

"There's orders from the Big Boss you're to feed when you like and sleep as long as you want," he said smilingly as he indicated a place at one of the long plank tables set out with accurately aligned rows of granite-ware dishes and great graniteware bowls of white sugar.

One of Macdougall's bull cooks brought in oatmeal porridge, a platter heaped high with bacon and eggs, toast, a jug of Snowshoe syrup and a big graniteware pot of steaming coffee. Hammond had the diner to himself. He never remembered an occasion in his life when he felt so hungry or a meal appealed to him as so inviting. There is something in the tang of the open-air North that puts a real edge on one's appetite, and there are no workers so insistent about the skill of the men who cook meals for them as lumber-jacks.

Macdougall returned from the kitchen a few moments later, and, lighting a cigarette, sat down on the plank bench near Hammond with back and elbows on the

table. "I saw your duds when I tumbled out this morning," he remarked, "but I suspected you were some friend of the boss's who'd come late in the night and I didn't wake you—Well, for the love of Mike, look who's here!"

Hammond whirled.

At the door of the diner stood a weird figure. His face was swarthy, almost black, with livid red scars on the cheek-bones below each eye. Straight black hair, coarse as a horse's mane, fell in glossy strands to his shoulders from his uncovered head, where a single eagle's feather was fastened at the back with a band of purple bound round the temples and the brow. He wore a much-beaded, close-fitting costume of brightly-coloured blanket-cloth, shoepack moccasins and string upon string of glistening white wolves' teeth around his neck.

His was a face of deep sagacity, features aquiline and regular as a white man's but possessing that solemn majesty of the headmen of Northern tribes. It was made the more forbidding by the self-inflicted wounds in the cheeks, and the whites of his eyes showed garishly as he leisurely surveyed the room.

"Ogima Bush," he announced in a deep voice that commanded respect in spite of his bizarre appearance. "Ogima Bush look to find Big Boss."

"Mr. Smith?" It was Macdougall who spoke.

"Un-n-n-n—Smid. Maybe you know where me find?"

"Gone," informed Macdougall, throwing out his arms expressively. "Gone away out on lake early. Maybe not be back for long time."

The Indian grunted. "Maybe you tell him Big Boss Ogima Bush come to see him? Tell him big Medicine Man."

"All right," assented Macdougall.

The Indian turned and strode out, but not before he fixed Hammond for one fleeting instant with an uncanny

flash from his fierce black eyes, a glint in them that seemed to pierce the young man through and through.

"Some motion picture get-up that," Hammond observed when the door closed behind him. "An Indian chief, I suppose?"

"No, worse than that," sniffed the cook. "He's what they call a medicine man; even the whites out here step out of the trail to let that bird pass. Besides, one's got to be civil to them red-skinned loafers," he explained, "because the super. is in some way cahoots with them and their pagan deviltry. Some say he's really one of them only he happened to be born white."

Hammond had to laugh over the other's rueful seriousness. "But is Smith really out?" he questioned. "I saw a lady come off the tug this morning and go into his office."

"A pretty little devil with dark eyes and a flashy set of furs?"

Hammond nodded.

"That's Yvonne," said Sandy the Cook. "Yes, and maybe she wasn't rearin' mad when she found the Big Boss was out. She's got to go back on the tug this morning, and nobody here, not even Mooney, the assistant super., knows where Smith's gone or when he'll be back."

Breakfast finished, Hammond lit his pipe and strolled out intending to look up the camp store and secure the bush clothing Acey Smith had the night before advised him to rig out in. At the door his attention was attracted to the dock by the tooting of the tug now making ready to pull out. Two figures stood in earnest conversation at the foot of the tug's tiny gangway. The one was the girl in the sable furs and picture hat and the other was a tall, black-bearded man in a rusty black suit, the coat of which was over-long and square cut at the bottom.

"Now I wonder what Yvonne is chinnin' to that old goof about?" speculated the cook at Hammond's shoulder. "He's another character that just bumped into camp a day or so ago."

"Looks like some sort of a preacher," hazarded Hammond.

"That's what he calls himself—Rev. Nathan Stubbs," replied Sandy. "He holds psalm-singing sessions nights and Sundays, but he's never around camp through the day when the Big Boss is here. The Big Boss gave Mooney orders to keep him out of his sight because he always made him feel like committin' murder. Smith's funny that way; some people he takes a violent dislike to right away."

One of the tug's men plucked at the girl's sleeve and motioned her to hurry up the gangway. The Rev. Nathan Stubbs lifted his hat and shook hands with her when they parted.

"That's funny—damn funny." There was perplexity in Macdougall's undertone observation. "I can't understand Yvonne making up to the likes of him."

"Does she *often* come out here?" Hammond asked it with an incautious inflection. He sensed that when it was too late.

The other eyed him queerly, almost suspiciously. "Now maybe that isn't any of my business to be gassin' about," the cook declared. "But you don't look like a snoop, and I don't know anything that's worth quizzin' me for at that. I'll advise you this much, mate: Don't be surprised at anything you see or hear out here, and if you know what's good for you you won't go pryin' into what you don't understand. It's a queer layout this, a mighty queer layout—and Acey Smith, the Big Boss, is the queerest thing in it."

CHAPTER V

THE WAY OF A WOMAN

I

VIEWED from the deck of a great lakes steamer travelling the commercial lane that runs less than two miles south of it, Amethyst Island is but a black speck among a hundred other foam-rimmed islets that dot Superior's rugged north shore, an infinitesimal bit of rock and dry land before a frowning background of deep-riven hills, where range upon range breasts out from Nannabijou Point and disappears into the purple of the northern horizon. Time and evolution work few changes on those hills of desolation which rear their black, fantastic peaks above hostile, spruce-bearded flanks like age-chained monsters scorning in lofty nudity the might of man to efface or reclaim their barrenness. Everywhere they whisper of dark potentialities; of secret places where awful stillness reigns, of skulking grey wolves and gleaming white bones.

To the right of the clifflike point and seemingly rising just back of the skirting woods opposite Amethyst Island is the Cup of Nannabijou, a castlelike circle of black cliffs, whose base is really a stiff walk from the shoreline. It is territory to this day shunned by wandering Indian tribes, believed to be the prison in which Nannabijou, the Indian demi-god, attempted to wall up Animi-kee, the Thunder Devil; and this belief is strengthened in poor Lo's mind by the magnetic flashes which play up from the hills on nights preceding electrical storms.

Along a depression at the base of the cliffs flows Solomon Creek on its way to join the mighty, amber-coloured Nannabijou River before the latter empties into the bay. Solomon Creek tumbles out in a foaming white cascade from a great fissure in the cliffs, being the outlet for a limpid mountain lake confined by the walls of the Cup, a gleaming pool of gold by day and a mystic black mirror of the stars by night. In the rocks the Indians see the images of the men and beasts of their pagan worship; from a distance out on the lake the whole resembles the form of a recumbent giant lying on his back on the face of the waters.

But Amethyst Island itself, on closer inspection, proves of happier mien than its forbidding surroundings and of dimensions somewhat more significant than one would guess from the steamboat routes. Its area would equal half a city block and its shoreline is groved by patches of picturesque birch gleaming white among the mountain ash and spruce, while here and there a lofty, isolated white pine rears its whispering crest above the lower foliage with an air of patriarchal guardianship. A half dozen log cabins of substantial size and dove-tailed construction stand in the cleared centre, relics of a bygone silver mining boom, later renovated by wealthy city families into summer resort cottages.

In the most easterly of these cottages, Josephine Stone, of Calgary, had taken up her temporary residence. On this particular morning, which had broken in crisp autumnal loveliness, she had been astir from an early hour, and with her Indian maid and her companion, Mrs. Johnson, had set in order the appointments of the little front room with exacting care. No detail had been overlooked to make the best of such furnishings as the building boasted; even the blinds Miss Stone had herself accurately adjusted so that the softest light illumined the

room. In the broad fireplace, built of native amethyst-encrusted boulders, a birch fire crackled in subdued cheeriness. On the table which centred the room stood a vase of fresh-gathered ferns, a bit of dull green colour that toned with the dignified quiet all about.

But Josephine Stone needed no artificial setting. A dream of fresh young womanly loveliness she was; a gentle presence that would brighten and glorify the most monotonous surroundings. Men wherever she had appeared had been swayed by this girl's rare beauty, by the charm of her voice and her every gesture.

She had long since learned her power over men; this morning she was minded to test it impelled as she was by that resistless motive that has been called a woman's curiosity—the motive that first brought mortal man to grief.

She moved about the room as one who is suppressing by will the tensest inward anxiety. Her Indian woman dismissed, she had tried to interest herself in a book, but her gaze most of the time was centred through the eastern window on a jutting point of the lake's shoreline.

Josephine Stone dropped the book and caught at her breath. Round the point there suddenly flashed the slender red hull of a racing motor boat, bow reared in air above a creamy wavelet that widened V-like in its wake. The boat swept down the shoreline and the muffled staccato of its engines ceased abruptly as it dived from view under the shrubbery that fringed the island.

II

The girl watched with bated breath. From an opening in the shrubbery there almost immediately burst into view the figure of a man who seemed the incarnation of this wild place. Spare was he, but of height, build and

movement that bespoke physical strength of lightninglike potentialities. The exotic pallor of his masterful face accentuated the blackness of his alert, flashing eyes.

The Indian man-of-all-work, splitting firewood to the side of the cottage, looked up, gasped and scuttled from view. His wolf-dog sank back on his haunches, tilted his grey snout in air and sent forth a long, dolorous howl that brought mocking echoes from the cliffs of the mainland.

The visitor, quite unconcerned by the seeming panic his appearance provoked, strode easily to the front door.

Josephine Stone rose all a-tremble. A fear unaccountable had suddenly swept over her, but when she opened the door for him there was no longer outward trace of it.

"Oh, Mr. Smith," she voiced, "I know I have put you to a lot of trouble to come over here this morning. It is really too good of you simply to accommodate a stranger."

"I will not have you mention it, Miss Stone," he waived with a courtly smile. "It is I rather who should offer apologies,"

"You?"

"I'm late. Delayed by the discovery of a defective boom on my way here. Had to go back and notify one of the boom-tenders."

"You have heavy responsibilities."

There was the faintest of inflections on the last word. It brought a momentary gleam of hard alertness to the face of Acey Smith. But he as quickly hid it in a light laugh. "It all came about through my weakness for travelling by water," he went on. "You see, there is a shorter cut by the land trail here, though I would have had to signal for one of your boats to get over to the island."

"Won't you be seated?" She indicated the easy chair

by the window and herself sank gracefully to the nearby couch.

"Mr. Smith," she opened in a nervous confusion that brought the faintest of pink to her delicate throat and cheeks, "I fear I am asking of you too great a favour—that I am about to request too much."

"If you had not asked me to come here and offer what little service I may," he replied, "I would consider I had been robbed of one of the most wonderful opportunities of my lifetime."

"But have you considered the full nature of my request?"

The spell of those wonder eyes under the high-arched brows was upon him. "Name it," he urged. "I must obey."

"You must not compromise yourself before you know it all."

"I have already compromised myself. I have promised to do anything within my power."

She stirred on the couch, came ever so little nearer to him. "I have feared my request might be an impossible one."

"An impossible one?"

"Yes—yet—I had hoped almost that you might—"

"Please," he encouraged. "Tell me what it is."

"I want to meet the *man you call J.C.X.*"

Had she plunged ice-cold water upon him the effect on Acey Smith could not have been more startling. His face went ashen at the name, his long hands gripping convulsively at the arms of the chair. He glanced apprehensively about the room, even behind him, then sprang bolt upright.

"J.C.X." He breathed it hoarsely. "There are no others within hearing?"

"Not a soul." It was she who was calmer now. She

too had risen, was standing with a thrilling nearness to him, so close as to be within the province of his arms had he obeyed an almost irresistible impulse that was upon him to sweep her to him. She looked up at him, a steadiness in the appeal of her eyes.

Under the sway of those eyes decision within him wavered. When he spoke it was in a tone of solemn pronouncement: "Miss Stone, you *have* asked of me what *should be* impossible."

"But *you* can make it a possibility?"

"The ultimate decision lies with—J.C.X." Again that furtive glance about the room as he pronounced the name in a whispered undertone. "It were better—perhaps—that you should not meet J.C.X."

"Is he so terrible?"

"No, it is not that. If I could in some way act as intermediary, for instance?"

But the girl was in no wise willing to let slip by her hard-won concession. "It would not do," she negatived. "I am sorry, for I know I could trust you as such, but I feel it is imperative that I should meet J.C.X. personally if that which I was sent for is to be properly explained."

His eyes searched her face. "What do you know of J.C.X.?" he asked.

"Nothing—positively nothing. Oh, I wish I could explain. I hate being mysterious, but for the present I must ask you to accept my statement that it appeals to me as vital to meet him. Can you accept such a statement?"

Under stress of her anxiety she had unconsciously placed an ivory-white little hand upon his sleeve. He thrilled at the pressure.

"I can and do accept it," he returned. "What is more, when the time is opportune, you shall meet the one you

desire to. But you must be patient; for a little while there will be obstacles which are insurmountable."

"Oh, how can I thank you, Mr. Smith?" Impulsively she seized his hand in both her own, artlessly as a child might do it.

Not even saint might have resisted that delicate, desirable presence so near. Acey Smith was far from saint. His long, powerful hands closed over hers, a devil of gleaming black triumph leaping to the eyes that feasted on her face.

But even as she drew away, trembling like a captured bird, he released her abruptly. His head shot forward and he whirled with his back toward her, his hands cupping at his face in the convulsive fashion of one who is strangling.

She was standing mute in stupefied fright when he faced her again, quite his former self, a trace of a shamed smile on his lips. "I am sorry," he offered in a contrite tone.

"It was perhaps my fault—" She started to say that before its significance struck her.

"It was not!" he declared. "I had forgotten for the moment that—that I am merely a means to an end. It will not happen again."

The girl did her best to hide her mystification. Before he left Acey Smith informed her the tugs plying daily between the pulp camp and the city were at her service. He had made arrangements not only for her passage back and forth, but for the carrying of such supplies out as she needed from time to time. This would be much more satisfactory than depending on the motor-boat, he told her, as from now on the weather on the northern reaches of Superior was not dependable.

As for the unexplained purpose for which she had been brought to the island, he hoped she would be tol-

erant of a delay in bringing things about that would not only take time but patience and foresight on the part of others. He did not mention J.C.X. again nor the meeting he had promised to arrange for Miss Stone. But intuitively the latter knew two things; the one was that he would be as good as his word and the other that he almost dreaded mention of J.C.X.

Besides, Josephine Stone was but two generations removed from Canadian pioneer stock, and, like the women of her race, was not prone to question the moods and whimsicalities of men of the forests.

III

When Acey Smith left Amethyst Island he did not immediately head back for the pulp camp, but crossed over to the mainland opposite, where he beached the bow of his long, slender racer at the foot of a narrow trail that wound up into the densely wooded hills. Snubbing the boat to the shrubbery, he struck off up the trail and was gone for almost an hour.

Shortly after his form had been swallowed up in the bush, there appeared at the foot of the trail a tall, dark-bearded man in the garb of a preacher. He peered at the island from the screen of the bush, and there, concealed from view, squatted in the foliage with eyes upon the cottage, silent, immovable as a statue.

Josephine Stone came out upon the cottage steps and opened a book in her lap. If the figure in the woods noticed her he gave no sign.

After a long interval there came from out of the depths of the forest, far away, a low reverberating intonation as of some deep soft gong being struck. A few moments elapsed and the mellow note again swooned mystically over the wastes.

The faintest traces of a smile broke over the face of the man hidden in the bushes as the girl on the steps started to her feet and looked about her in bewilderment. She picked up her book and disappeared into the cottage.

Twice again with a short interval between there came a gonglike alarm from far up in the silent wastes. The black-bearded man rose at the sound of the last stroke of the gong. With patient caution he drew from the shrubbery a cached canoe, launched it and with silent strokes skimmed westward along the shoreline.

Twenty minutes later Acey Smith came striding down the trail, carrying on his back a partially filled woodsman's packsack. At the foot of the trail he paused as though reading some sign in the sands of the beach. He swung the packsack from his shoulders into the cockpit of the boat, pushed off the craft and headed it toward the pulp camp docks.

There was a scowl on his face as black as a thunder cloud.

CHAPTER VI

A MILLIONAIRE VANISHES

I

AS the days went by Louis Hammond familiarised himself with the pulp camp and its environs. He had plenty of time on his hands, for, as Acey Smith had predicted, there was little else for him to do except "take in the scenery."

He gained a liberal education in the garnering of the raw product for the paper-making industry. The Nannabijou Limits, he learned, comprised an enormous block of wilderness territory some ninety square miles in extent, most of which, outside of the great muskegs and mountain lakes, was covered with forests of spruce, balsam and birch, representing billions of money when transformed into the white paper on which many of the great and lesser newspapers and magazines of the United States as well as Canada would be printed.

The limits stretched east down the North Shore from the foot of the Nannabijou range far beyond a point of vision and extended due north inland a good fifty or sixty miles. They were bisected by the mighty Nannabijou River, which emptied into the bay at the western fringe of the camp between deep, precipitous banks. It was this stream that made the Nannabijou Limits so desirable, because it made transportation of the cut poles by water possible from the furthest inland reaches of the territory. Armies of men were engaged in cutting, buck-sawing and decking poles into the river, there being camp after camp, some of them larger than that at the

waterfront, for a good twenty miles up the stream. Men and teams were constantly employed hauling supplies back to them. Yet it was said that this season's cut would scarcely make a scratch on the gigantic Nannabijou forests.

From the mouth of the Nannabijou the cut and barked poles poured into the bay in a wide, glistening white ribbon day and night, continually expanding the tremendous booms, where Hammond was told there was already nearly a million dollars' worth of pulpwood. Later on, power-driven mechanical loaders on scows would transfer the poles from the booms to the holds of huge pulp-pole carriers, and in these they would be towed by tugs to the mill yards in Kam City.

A large portion of the wood must be delivered that very fall so that the Kam City Pulp and Paper Company could have their mills in operation on contract time in October. Otherwise, the latter company would forfeit their hard-won rights on the limits; and by the terms of the final fiat of the Ontario government the North Star Towing and Contracting Company, at present operating the limits, were bound to deliver the wood in sufficient quantities to keep the Kam City Company's mills running all winter.

It was a stupendous undertaking—the most colossal in the history of paper-making. And woven into this was the intense rivalry of the two powerful paper companies concerned, a tension of bitter hatred that was the more ominous because surface indications told nothing of what the inevitable climax might be.

II

Hammond gained much of his information about the limits from his shack-mate, Sandy Macdougall, the cook,

who in the evening over a bottle of rye whiskey became quite loquacious. It was through Macdougall he learned of the presence of the girl with the high-arched eyebrows on Amethyst Island, a bit of information that brought about a secret determination to somehow or other come in contact with her, much as the mere idea of again meeting her face to face perturbed him.

Of Acey Smith he saw little, caught only occasional glimpses of him now and then as he went in and out of his office. No one seemed to know where he kept himself a large part of the time. Actual operation of the camps and dealings with the men were carried on almost entirely by the assistant superintendent, a raw-boned, hatchet-faced young man named Mooney, who was as uncommunicative as a slab of trap rock.

Ogima Bush, the Indian medicine man, seemed to have the freedom of the camp, to which he paid frequent visits, mixing with the workers of his own race of whom there were several hundred employed in breaking up jams in the river and tending the booms in the bay. They were what was known as the "white water" men because of their hazardous work in the foaming rapids.

Rev. Nathan Stubbs, the camp preacher, journeyed back and forth from one camp to the other. He did not sleep in any of the camps but repaired each night to some isolated shack he had fixed up for himself somewhere in the fastnesses of Nannabijou Mountain. He seemed to purposely avoid Hammond, as he did most of the executives of the limits, and a feature that struck the young man as rather odd was that he never saw Ogima Bush or the Rev. Nathan Stubbs and Acey Smith together or even in the camp at the one time, though the Medicine Man frequently inquired as to the superintendent's whereabouts and on such occasions immediately struck off as though he had an appointment with him some-

where. It was plain that Acey Smith looked upon the preacher as a pest and insisted on him making himself scarce when he was about camp; as for the Medicine Man, there seemed to be some understanding between him and the superintendent whereby the former was quite confident of his status and privileges anywhere on the limits.

There was something queer—so queer as to be absolutely uncanny—about this gigantic pulp camp. Hammond could see that every intelligent worker in it sensed this, but nobody understood it or could tangibly grasp a glimmer of what it was. The morale among the cutting gangs, teamsters and boom workers could scarcely be improved upon. Men who shirked their work lost the regard of their fellows and either soon learned to put their best into their efforts or left camp. The North Star Company held the reputation of paying and feeding their employes better than any other outfit in the north country. There were camp hospitals with camp doctors and competent men nurses; it was even said that no man was docked for lost time while he was really sick. Incidentally, there were no evidences of iron discipline or slave-driving methods. But everywhere among the men and their petty executives there was an undercurrent of something akin to superstitious awe of the company and those who directed its affairs.

Acey Smith himself seemed to be obsessed with this same haunting apprehension. When he issued orders he did so more like one who is interpreting definite commands from elsewhere. As Sandy Macdougall analysed it to Hammond after his own peculiar fashion, "one felt as though the whole show was being run by *some one or something that didn't cast a shadow.*"

III

His enforced idleness brought a notion to the young ex-newspaper man that he could improve his time by writing, even if it were only a diary of his experiences. He felt he must have something to occupy his time besides roaming over the tote roads and riding around in the fussy little gasoline tugs of the boom-tenders, so, early one morning he presented himself at Acey Smith's office and boldly asked if he might have some loose writing paper. Acey Smith quite readily complied with his wishes, going to the rear of his office and bringing to Hammond several pads of blank sheets.

"I had been expecting you to come around for this," he said, the ghost of an exultant flicker playing at the corners of his mouth. "The ruling hobby will force itself to the surface sooner or later, won't it, Mr. Hammond?"

"Meaning just what?"

"Just this: Set a man at doing nothing long enough and habit will drive him back to the haunts of his old rut—especially if that rut is writing for publication."

Hammond illy-suppressed a start at this broad hint at knowledge of his identity. "I have no designs for writing anything for publication, if that's what you're driving at," he, however, came back frankly.

"I have not the remotest notion that you will," Acey Smith assured him with a tinge of sarcasm in his tones. "In fact, I am quite confident that for the present you won't reach a publisher."

He stared strangely at Hammond for a silent second, his black eyes glazing in a weird fixidity. Hammond was conscious Acey Smith was speaking now more as one trying to interpret a whim of the back mind: "Now, if I were a novelist, which I am not, and in the mood, likewise absent, I might make myself the author of the queer-

est tale ever written. It's a pity the world gets most of its literature second-hand and consequently garbled; the man who lives things doesn't write, and the man who writes never seems able to live the things he writes about.

"Real writers then must be men born twice who never touched pen to paper till their second existence, don't you think so, Mr. Hammond?"

"I have never considered it from that angle," replied the younger man. "Thank you for the paper, Mr. Smith."

"Think it over," urged Acey Smith enigmatically as he whirled on a heel and returned to his desk.

Hammond went away inwardly as chagrined as a disguised man who has had his wig and false beard suddenly whisked from his head and face. His attempt to conceal his identity from Acey Smith surely had been a ridiculous farce. Perhaps the pulp camp superintendent knew more than he did himself about what purpose lay behind his being sent to the limits.

The situation was a humiliating one, Hammond bitterly conceded as he sat alone in the cabin he shared with the cook. It would be bad enough to be found out and know what one was found out for, but it was infinitely more exasperating to feel that he was a marked man without knowing the exact nature of the predicament he had allowed himself to be dropped into. Acey Smith had a manner of making Hammond feel like a mere outsider every time they came in contact, and the latter, completely in the dark as to the objects of his own mission, was as impotent to meet and parry the other's stinging thrusts as a man who fences with a blind-fold on. Smith did not exactly despise him; he had reason to believe that. It was Smith's lightly-concealed exultation over knowledge of his helplessness that galled him so.

Hammond longed to meet the other on fair ground—in a battle of wits or fists, he was not particular which, so long as he could exact satisfaction for his hurt pride. But this fighting in the dark was a hopeless business, and he was becoming weary of it.

Yet—what did Smith know? What *did* he know?

With this conjecture came an inspiration that brought Hammond a newer and a brighter viewpoint. When he more calmly mulled the situation over in the seclusion of his quarters, it struck him Acey Smith was merely guessing. He had not definitely referred to him as an newspaper man, but had merely insinuated he knew him to be a writer. This was a thing one so shrewd of observation as the pulp camp master might easily surmise when Hammond asked for writing paper. That subsequent drifting of his onto the status of fiction writers was a cast for information, his reference to the genius of writing men an obvious attempt at flattery—and the hook was baited with a hint that he himself had a life-story that would be worth while getting hold of.

The whole thing seemed so clear now that Hammond accused himself of stupidity in not seeing through it before. Hammond's plan therefore would be to follow the plane of the least resistance and let Smith go on thinking what he pleased. Even better still, why not approach Smith for that "queerest tale" he had referred to and make a play to his vanity? No doubt egotism was Acey Smith's most vulnerable point and the *open sesame* to his confidence, as Hammond in his journalistic experience had found it to be with most despotic executives, high or low.

But no, that would not do. There was one thing in the way still. If he only knew what he was here for he could act. As things stood, he feared to take the initiative lest he blunder into something that would upset the plan Norman T. Gildersleeve had in mind that night on

the train when he had engaged Hammond at a thousand dollars a month to stay at the pulp camp till he received further orders. No matter how he theorised and tried to prop it up with possible purposes, it appealed more and more to him as a crazy assignment. Bagsful of mail was brought over daily on the tugs, and, so far as Hammond could see, the mail was delivered direct and with considerable despatch all over the camps. It should therefore be an easy matter for Gildersleeve to write him, if it were only a few lines, to let him know whether or not things were progressing as they should. Why didn't Gildersleeve communicate with him?

IV

The plump figure and ruddy visage of Sandy Macdougall appeared momentarily at the cabin doorway and he flung a bundle of newspapers across at Hammond. "The Big Boss left them at the breakfast table this morning and said you might like to see them," he explained. "I guess he's beat it for somewhere for the day, for I saw him leave with his pack on his back just a minute or two after you left his office. Come over to the beanery for a chat when you're through reading up the news."

The head cook turned and departed for his realm of bake ovens and enamelled pots and pans.

That was Acey Smith's humiliating system all over again, ruminated Hammond. Smith had eaten that very morning just two seats away from Hammond with the newspapers spread on the table before him. When he had finished breakfast, he folded them up and sat smoking until Hammond left the diner. Why did he wait till Hammond went out and then tell the cook to give him the papers? It was a by-word around the camps that Acey Smith never did anything out of the ordinary with-

out a definite object in view. He was evidently baiting Hammond for a purpose.

Nevertheless, Hammond gathered up the newspapers gratefully. They were the first of recent date he had seen since coming to the pulp camp. The light in the cabin was none too bright, so Hammond took the papers outside and seated himself on a rustic bench back of the cabin.

The outer paper in the bundle was the *Kam City Star* of the previous morning, but Hammond, his eyes starting from their sockets, scarcely noted the dateline in the shock that went home from the three-column heading that fairly shouted at him in black-faced gothic from the upper left-hand corner of the front page:—

MAN RESEMBLING NORMAN T. GILDERSLEEVE

REPORTED SEEN NEAR PRINCE ALBERT, SASK.

MAY BE MISSING PULP AND PAPER MAGNATE

In fevered haste, Hammond skipped over the sub-headings to the despatch below them date-lined from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, with date of the day previous:—

To-day, lumbermen coming in from the woods north of here told of the arrival in the McKenzie camps of a middle-aged stranger strongly resembling the descriptions sent broadcast of the missing Norman T. Gildersleeve, of New York, head of the International Investments Corporation, whose disappearance from a transcontinental train bound east from Winnipeg, on the night of September 23, caused a sensation in financial circles in Canada and the United States.

Strength is lent the theory that the man is Norman T. Gildersleeve by the statement of the lumbermen that the stranger seemed to be afflicted with loss of memory. He told the superintendent of the camps that he had seemed to come out of a state of trance after leaving a train at the terminus of the bush railway and had no idea who he was or where he came from. He put up for the night at the lumber camp, but the next

morning disappeared as mysteriously as he had arrived.

Mr. Gildersleeve, it will be remembered, first dropped out of sight while on a train bound from Winnipeg, Man., to Kam City, Ont. His intended visit to the latter place, it is understood, was in connection with the construction of the Kam City Pulp and Paper Mills plant, a Canadian subsidiary of the International Investments Corporation, now being erected at the lakeport town.

Since Mr. Gildersleeve's disappearance the police of the Dominion have been vainly scouring the country for trace of him. The news from the McKenzie Camps to-day will no doubt provide a fresh trail, though how Mr. Gildersleeve could travel back west almost a thousand miles without being identified by some one, particularly trainmen, is beyond the comprehension of authorities here.

There followed a grist of newspaper theories in which Hammond was not particularly interested. He scanned thoroughly the newspaper and two others in the bundle, but found no other items throwing further light on the mystery. An editorial in the edition he had first read caught his eye. It dealt with the odd circumstances of Norman T. Gildersleeve's disappearance and was headed:—

APHASIA, OR LOSS OF IDENTITY

Aphasia—aphasia—where had Hammond recently heard or read that word? Then with an electric start he remembered that disconcerting first question Acey Smith had flung at him the night he arrived at the pulp camp: "*What do you know about aphasia?*"

A coincidence it must have been, he reflected on calmer deduction. Acey Smith, out here at the pulp limits, twenty miles from the nearest outpost of civilisation, could then have no knowledge of Gildersleeve's disappearance several hundred miles west of the port of Kam City.

And yet—yet the Girl with the High-Arched Eye-

brows had just been in to see Smith previous to Hammond's visit. She had been in the same coach of the transcontinental when Gildersleeve had left the train at Moose Horn Station and failed to return—and her nervous perturbation on two occasions when she had caught sight of Hammond had been marked.

Great heavens, it could not be that she—this beautiful creature he had dreamed about, whose wondrous blue eyes haunted his waking hours—that she knew and had carried the news to Acey Smith! Hammond tried to banish the thought as a low, unfounded suspicion. It was merely a sinister muddle of events, he told himself, into which she, more so than himself, had been innocently drawn. That was it—certainly that was it.

He leaped to his feet and turned at a raucous, croaking sound behind him.

A hoarse, half-angry, half-startled exclamation came through his teeth as his gaze fell upon the gloomy, spectrelike figure of Ogima Bush the Medicine Man standing between two birch trees directly behind his seat. The Indian was as immovable, as untouched in face by any human emotion as if he had always stood there a carved figure in wood. The scars on his cheek-bones gleamed in fresh and horrid scarlet lividity, and his eyes with their garish white setting glowed like embers of hate in a gargoyles of unspeakable wickedness.

"What do you want?" demanded Hammond sharply.

"*Un-n-n-n ugh.*" The Medicine Man's eyes centred on Hammond much as they might have had he been a passing wesse-ke-jak while he gutturalled it. "Ogima Bush takes what he wants. *Kaw-gaygo esca-boba?*"

He turned leisurely, chuckling queerly in his throat as he uttered the question in Objibiwa.

Then he strode off into the bush quite unconcerned as to what answer Hammond might make.

CHAPTER VII

THE HILL OF LURKING DEATH

I

OLD Leather Face seems to be peeved about it, doesn't he?"

It was Sandy Macdougall who spoke. He had returned from the cook-house unnoticed by Hammond and had evidently been an amused spectator while the dialogue was going on between Hammond and Ogima Bush.

"Did you get what he croaked at you, Hammond?" he asked.

"I caught something about him 'taking what he wanted' or words to that effect."

"He said: 'Ogima takes what he wants,' and then he asked, '*Kaw-gaygo esca-boba?*' That's Indian for 'Have you got nothing?' Sounds foolish, but when an Indian asks it the way he did—that way, look out! He's either looking for whiskey or trouble."

"Well, he's rapping at the door of the goat's house for wool this time," laughed Hammond. "I haven't seen anything that looked like good whiskey in a blue moon, and, as for trouble, I can usually locate plenty of it without seeking it from a red-skin."

"Speakin' of whiskey," Sandy's eyes crinkled, "how'd you like a little nip right now?"

"A drink?"

"Sure. You're lookin' sort of all bowled over about something, and a little snort will brace you up. Come on in the shack."

Inside the cabin Macdougall closed the door and hooked it on the inside. He lifted some loose flooring in the corner and brought up a black bottle. "You needn't be afraid of it," he assured Hammond as he poured him a draught in a metal cup. "This is sealed rye goods I got on a doctor's prescription. But I got to keep it dark because there's two things the Big Boss is death on any of us totin' around camp; the one is six-guns and the other is whiskey. . . . Here's how!"

Macdougall guzzled a generous cupful straight. Hammond perforce had to take his neat too.

The cook made to fill the two cups again.

"No, thanks," declined Hammond. "I don't indulge as a general thing, but I'll admit that's fairly smooth stuff."

Sandy tossed off another stiff one. Then he sat down smacking his lips as though it agreed with him immensely. "You never met that copper-faced old rat before you came out here?" he asked presently.

"Who—Ogima Bush? No, I never before set eyes on him until that morning he wandered in while I was at breakfast."

"H'm—h'm—well!" Macdougall studied his cup reflectively one minute. "You know, I thought at first maybe you and him might be cahoots on something. One don't know who's who out in this queer dump. But I've sized you up as a decent head, no matter what your business might be, and you takin' a nip with me now and then has raised you a bit more in my notions of you."

"Good heavens," smiled Hammond, "you surely didn't think I was in league with that near-agent of Satan?"

"I ain't sayin' I was sure of anything," cut back Macdougall slightly irritated. "Only, I had one of my flash hunches that first morning he dropped into the diner that there was something between him and you. It was the

way he looked at you, I guess. Since then, I've been figurin' out it's all on his side and maybe you don't know anything about it.

"However," he followed up deliberately, "what I been debatin' in my own mind the past day or so was about tellin' you something for your own good."

Macdougall appeared to be in the throes of that mental debate as he sat with eyes glued on his empty cup. He seemed to arrive at two decisions suddenly. The first was to have another tidy drink.

"Great hootch that." He grimaced gratefully. "Now, look here, Hammond, it's this: That old, red-skinned side-wheeler don't mean you no good, and, if you'll take it from me, I think he's figurin' on how much of a boost it'd take to shoot you over one of them steep cliffs back in the bush if you happened to be near the edge.

"Now wait—I ain't given to guessin' nor romancin' either. I got a sharp eye that sees more'n most people gives it credit for. Every time you ain't lookin' that Indian is a-watchin' you out of the corners of his wicked old lids in a queer, creepy way, just like a weasel watches a chipmunk he's figurin' on for breakfast. Besides, sometimes you go out in the bush and he slips out a little later in the same direction. At first I tells myself: 'The two of them has a date on to meet out there on some scheme they're hatchin' up—maybe bootleggin'.' But I hunched it later there was nothin' to that. He's layin' for you for some reason I don't know anything about; that's what I wanted to tell you."

II

Hammond lit a cigarette to cover up any concern he might have felt. "That's certainly interesting to me, Sandy," he acknowledged, "and it's deucedly good of you—"

"Nothin' of the kind!" interposed the other. "And that ain't all. *Acey Smith's got another Indian trailin' you.*"

"Trailing me? The deuce you say!"

"I said it."

"But what makes you think Acey Smith's got anything to do with it?"

Macdougall shrugged. "Who else?" he asked. More whiskey than was discreet had loosened up his tongue. "Who else do you think? Who else but Acey Smith keeps every straw-boss in the camp jumpy all the time just so they won't get too busy comparin' notes and find out what's what? That man's a devil, and there ain't two ways about that.

"I got next to this stunt through an accident," the cook went on. "Was over hidin' in some green stuff on the side of the Second Hill the other morning figurin' on snipin' a couple of partridge when I sees you go by on the tote road. Then I see a long, skinny-lookin' Indian slippin' through the brush close to my hide after you. A couple of minutes more and along comes old Leather Face, the Medicine Man, as pompous as you please, but it ain't long before I discovers that his nibs is a-watchin' both of you, though he makes a big face of bein' unconcerned and about his own business. Now, what do you think of that layout, son?"

Hammond was thoughtful. If he were to admit the truth his breath was literally taken away by the revelation. "Smith must attach a lot of importance to me to hire two of them to watch me," was what he said.

"I ain't so sure *both* of them is hired to watch you," observed his friend. "Medicine men are too stuck on themselves to do shadowin' jobs. They go after bigger stuff. Smith uses them to put the fear of the Lord into the Indian workers when he needs them. That's one of

the reasons why he lets old fakirs like Bush loaf around the camp and do what they please. No Indian gives any back talk about what the Medicine Man says or does, because they think he can make a *Windigo* any time he feels like it to bring them bad luck."

"Well, then, Sandy," urged Hammond, "what's your theory? I'll admit it's got me beaten."

"I got it figured out as one of two things," replied the cook. "Either you're hired by outside parties to get something on Smith or the North Star he's afraid you'll find out, and he's havin' you shadowed—or else, well, don't take offence if I say it plain that this looks to me more like it: you've been sent out here by some of the higher-ups for him to take care of you and he has that Indian guy watchin' to see that nothin' happens to you."

"Good heavens," Hammond expostulated, "I'm not a child or a green-horn in the woods that I can't look after myself. Smith knows that. No, no, Sandy, you're away out on your theories this time."

"Am I now?" ruffled the cook. "Let me tell you Smith knows too that you ain't any smarter than some of the other fellows who paid for their smartness by cashin' in to some kind of a lurkin' death out there in the sticks that comes down on a man without any warnin' and lets him into Kingdom Come without even a yelp bein' heard from him."

Hammond was convinced the liquor in Sandy was doing the talking now. But he tactfully asked: "Ever know of anything like that happening to any one, or is it just some of that camp gossip about spooks over on the mountain?"

"Camp gossip and spooks me eye!" derided the other. "Ain't there been men disappeared around here just as if they was swallowed up bones and all by something roamin' round the hills? Yes, I know what you're goin'

to say next about accidents happenin', and all that sort of thing. 'Course there's muck-holes in the muskegs that they might have walked into or been pushed into and never be seen again. But nobody here thinks that's just what happened. No, sir, you couldn't tell them that. There ain't an Indian will go up in them hills west of here after sundown for life nor money, and whites that are wise won't do it neither.

"Listen. This much I know from what I saw myself. Last summer there was a pale-faced city gink come out here on a loafin' holiday. He came pretty much like you did and nobody knew anything about him unless it was the super., who keeps what he knows to himself. This lad put in his time makin' pictures on pieces of card-board on a frame of sticks he took around with him. The Big Boss warned him and everybody else warned him if he left the camps not to wander off the tote roads, and to keep away from the hill they call the Cup of Nannabijou. But it didn't do any good.

"One morning they finds his hat floatin' in the lake back of the beaver dam on Solomon Creek. That's the creek that runs down the hill into the river and has the rapids in it. They never found anything else, not a hair or a bit of the hide of him. D'you get that?"

"Likely slipped and fell into the rapids," suggested Hammond.

"That's what one of them coroner's juries would say," agreed the cook, "but you couldn't make any old timers out here believe it. Besides, his picture-drawing outfit was found a couple of hundred yards away from the creek all set up the way he'd been workin' on it when he got his. The Indians always said there was one of their ancient devils lived up in The Cup on the hill, and the rest of us is prepared to believe there's something uncanny there it ain't good business to monkey with."

Macdougall fished out his watch. "Cripes," he exclaimed, "it's eleven and I should've been back at the cook-house half an hour ago."

He put his bottle back under the boards after a final rejuvenator. At the door of the cabin he paused unsteadily as though gripped by an after-thought. "Anyway, Hammond, I'd pack a gun if I was you," he advised. "If you ain't got a gat. of your own, there's an army six-gun and some shells to fit it in that pack of mine on the wall, and you're welcome to the loan of it."

Before Hammond could thank him he was gone and soon there resounded from the cook-house a mixture of expletives and highly ornamented opinions in general on "worthless, soldierin' bull cooks" which proved that Sandy, plus dispensary whiskey, was trying to make up for lost time over the pots and pans.

III

That afternoon Hammond wandered out into the woods to quietly think things over. He selected a spot at the top of a bald hill where any one shadowing him would have difficulty in finding sufficient cover within a hundred yards in any given direction. Lighting his pipe, he started piecing things together as they had occurred since he made that extraordinary bargain with Norman T. Gildersleeve on the night of September the twenty-third. First, Gildersleeve had engaged him to come out here and put in his time any old way he cared to so long as he did not disclose his identity or the facts of his bargain with Gildersleeve. Secondly, Gildersleeve had confided nothing to him as to the object of his mission and had not even told him that he, Gildersleeve, was the head of the corporation that financed the company that had gained the cutting rights on the Nan-

nabijou Limits over the head of the North Star Towing and Contracting Company now in control. In the third place, there was the cold fact that Gildersleeve had almost immediately disappeared and Hammond was left in the air out at the pulp camp, an object of suspicion constantly shadowed and still left totally at sea as to what he was to do next.

He initiated some of the methods he had used with considerable success in his old police court reporting days to devise plausible theories for crime mysteries, but none of them seemed to work. Gildersleeve for one thing was a keen, hard-headed business man. If he wasn't he could never have reached and maintained a place at the head of a big financial corporation. He had certainly shown no symptoms of mental derangement while Hammond had been talking to him, and, if he had been stricken with aphasia, as the papers said, it must have been after he left the train at Moose Horn Station. Therefore, when he engaged Hammond, a total stranger to him previously, at one thousand dollars a month plus his keep and a hundred dollars as a camouflage salary, he must have had some deep, important motive. It could not have been for espionage work; in fact, Hammond remembered, Gildersleeve had emphasised the point that he, Hammond, would not be asked to do anything more than hold down any job that was assigned to him and keep his identity concealed.

There was every reason to conclude, Hammond theorised, that the whole object of his residence at the pulp camp was to make himself a mystery. Perhaps he was thus unconsciously impersonating some one else for a purpose that only more knowledge of the situation would disclose. This theory was plausible enough when he sized the thing up from the angle of his agreement with Gildersleeve alone.

There had been surrounding circumstances, however, that led him mentally around in circles and up against baffling blank walls. There had been the strange perturbation of Eulas Daly, the U. S. consul, when the latter had broached Hammond regarding meeting Gildersleeve, and the appearance of the dark-eyed woman wearing the sable furs on the platform of Moose Horn Station after Gildersleeve had gone out wearing his overcoat and carrying his bag with no apparent intention of returning to catch the train. A woman does not get off a train at a wilderness station in the dead of the night merely to look around for pleasure, and the mystery of her performance was heightened by her subsequent appearance at the pulp camp in search of Acey Smith. She was known there, for Sandy Macdougall had spoken familiarly of her as "Yvonne," but had afterwards refused to discuss her.

Acey Smith's question about aphasia that first night he had arrived at the Nannabijou Limits struck Hammond as a very, very odd coincidence—if it was a coincidence. Still, Acey Smith could not have had definite knowledge of the manner of Gildersleeve's disappearance at that stage of proceedings. So Hammond discarded that incident as unsolvable for the present and therefore an impediment to clear thinking.

The Girl with the High-arched Eyebrows constantly limned up in the background of all his conjectures, a beautiful, distracting presence, but Hammond could not bring himself to the point of concluding she was in any way consciously connected with this queer business. She might be Gildersleeve's private secretary, or even his daughter, which circumstances might explain her visit to the camp as one in quest of possible information as to Gildersleeve's whereabouts. But the articles in the papers made no mention of any one accompanying Gildersleeve on his journey, and, if there had been, that point would

scarcely be overlooked, though it sorely puzzled Hammond on that same score how it was no mention was made of Eulas Daly being with the magnate. Why was it that Daly didn't tell what he knew about the matter?

Finally, there was Gildersleeve's instruction to Hammond to stick to his post at the pulp camp no matter what happened until such time as he was communicated with. Possible happenings in Gildersleeve's mind could not have included his dropping out of sight.

Out of it all Hammond could sift but two simple conclusions that would stand analysis, one of which was that Gildersleeve had actually been stricken and was wandering about the West somewhere without knowledge of who he was, and the other that Gildersleeve must have met with foul play and the man who was seen above Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, was some one else so afflicted, or feigning such affliction, who strongly resembled him.

In the first case, Hammond's remaining at the camp would be useless unless Gildersleeve suddenly recovered and returned to his duties. The second possibility would make it incumbent upon Hammond to tell the authorities what he knew with the least possible delay.

It all left him in a dilemma as to how he should act and take no chances on making a blunder of things. But wait—there was one link in the mystery, one of the first links at that that he had so far overlooked in the matter of its possibilities. That link was Eulas Daly, U. S. consul at Kam City, the man who had brought about his meeting with Gildersleeve. Why not slip over to the city and see Daly? Daly might be able to throw new light on the situation without Hammond disclosing anything that was confidential between himself and Gildersleeve. He would see about that at once anyway.

Hammond glanced at his watch and sprang to his

feet. A tug would be pulling out for Kam City in less than an hour. That would just give him time to get back to camp and change his clothes for the trip. He planned to spend the night and the following day in the city if Daly's information were re-assuring. If it were not he felt he must immediately see the police and tell them what he knew.

The young man hurried over the trail quite unconscious of the lithe, dark figure that rose from its hiding place at the edge of the bush and stole along in his wake as silent as a shadow. He reached the camp, changed his clothes, had a bite to eat in Sandy Macdougall's kitchen and hurried to the superintendent's quarters in search of a pass over on the tug.

Hammond was due to run into two new surprises, the first of which was a galling disappointment and the second of such a thrilling nature from a purely speculative standpoint that, for the time being, he forgot all about the first.

CHAPTER VIII

A MASTER MIND!

I

ARTEMUS DUFF, president and general manager of the Kam City Pulp and Paper Mills, subsidiary-to-be of the International Investment Corporation, was in a very much perturbed state of mind. Mr. Duff was an excitable person, though otherwise a normal, hard-headed type of big business circles, quite inured to the ordinary run of difficulties that beset new undertakings such as the Kam City Pulp and Paper Mills. But since his recent arrival from Toronto in Kam City a tremendous responsibility had been shifted to his shoulders, and though construction and installation at the mill had been progressing well up on schedule time, there were other incidentals that worried him exceedingly.

A plump little man with a round, clocklike face and rather small pale blue eyes, he sat chewing at an unlighted cigar and tilting back in a swivel office chair across the desk from Martin Winch, K.C., senior member of the legal firm of Winch, Stanton and Reid, solicitors for the Kam City Pulp and Paper Mills Company. Martin Winch, incidentally, was known to have been a confidential adviser of Norman T. Gildersleeve, head of the parent company that financed the paper manufacturing concern. The interview had been at Duff's earnest solicitation, the latter having an obsession that "something ought to be done" without a clear conception of what the "something" should be. The lawyer's calm, unruffled

manner of viewing the situation irritated Duff, who declared that "nobody seemed to see the crisis ahead except himself."

"Mr. Gildersleeve's disappearance has, as you state, occurred at a very critical period," Winch agreed. "But, on the other hand, Mr. Duff, all the machinery is complete in the way of contracts and agreements protecting us, and I can't see that there is anything more that we can do than sit tight and see that the North Star Towing and Contracting Company's order from the government for delivery of the raw product to us is carried out expeditiously."

"I am quite well aware of all that," discounted the president of the Kam City Pulp and Paper Mills, "and if Norman Gildersleeve were in the offing somewhere, or even if I knew exactly the plans he had in the back of his head when he approved of our agreement with the Ontario government and thereby agreed to the cutting and delivering contract on the part of the North Star Company I shouldn't waste a moment's worry over matters.

"I wouldn't mind the responsibility of taking full charge of affairs," he emphasised, "if I had a notion of Gildersleeve's preconceived plans for meeting possible trickery on the part of the North Star; but Gildersleeve, apparently, took nobody into his confidence on that score."

"But so far the North Star Company have not shown any tendency to violate the terms of the government fiat imposed on them," argued the lawyer. "In fact, I understand they have now almost the required amount of poles boomed in Nannabijou Bay ready for delivery to the mill. To my way of thinking, outside of the unfortunate disappearance of Mr. Gildersleeve, everything looks exceedingly rosy."

"That's just it," stormed Duff. "Everything looks

rosy—too damned rosy!” He slammed his badly mangled cigar into a nearby waste-basket. “Everything looks too damned rosy to be of good omen where such notorious pirates as the North Star Towing and Contracting Company are concerned. Winch, are you conscious of the fact that the North Star has smashed and utterly ruined every commercial enterprise that has attempted to enter into competition with them in the North?”

“Oh, well—circumstances alter cases,” hedged the lawyer. “Things are different—”

“Of course they’re different,” derided Duff. “The North Star never tackles two swindling campaigns with the same methods or their victims would learn to plan successful counter attacks. Look you, Winch, I’ve been delving a bit into local history just for the very purpose of studying these people and their methods. Through political manipulation, bribery, legal trickery and downright commercial theft and robbery, when they could get away with it, they have utterly destroyed every enterprise that has threatened to interfere with their exclusive exploitation of the resources of this northern country.”

“I’ll admit they’ve been unscrupulous—brazenly unscrupulous and aggressive,” quietly returned the man of the law, “but I think you exaggerate somewhat, Mr. Duff. I could name you a dozen concerns competitive of the North Star Company that have thrived for years without interference.”

“All small-fry concerns,” pointed out the other. “The North Star’s apparent policy has been to let the little fellows alone—even nurse them financially at times with an end in view; it finds them useful allies when there’s government lobbying afoot or a big political coup to be pulled off.

“But tell me,” he went on, “what’s been the fate of every enterprise of dimensions that has attempted to ex-

ist within the zone of the North Star's activities? Wasn't the Upper Lakes Towing and Salvaging Company at one time the most flourishing marine concern on Lake Superior? What did the North Star do to them? Swept them from the North Shore till they hadn't a propeller turning between here and the Soo. What happened the Independent Fur Trading Company that once held exclusive trading treaties with the Indians all the way north to the Bay Company's boundaries? The North Star weaned their business away from them by selling the Indians alleged cough medicine that was five per cent pure alcohol and drove them out paupers. Where is the Oliphant Transfer Ship Company that enjoyed practically all the marine switching business in northern harbours? They've been supplanted by the Kam City Legboat Corporation, subsidiary to the North Star. Who's behind the All-West Trading and Storage Limited that ousted the Dominion Grain Dealers and grabbed off all their elevators between here and The Hat? It's the North Star—everybody knows that.

"Yes, I could go on enumerating until it sounded like a book of epitaphs from a commercial graveyard," continued Duff. "The North Star did not pay thirty cents on the dollar of value for the business of any one of the unfortunate concerns it squelched out and absorbed. It was all accomplished by business buccaneering methods unparalleled on this continent for audacity and cunning. In every case, so far as I can learn, it was a totally unexpected coup, swift and certain as lightning, that crumpled up the North Star's rivals.

"These things are what you'd call precedent in legal parlance, Winch," opined Duff, "and therefore, what we've got to figure on meeting from the North Star is the unexpected—like a bolt from a clear sky."

II

Martin Winch fussed with a sheaf of clipped type-written sheets before him. "They cannot very well get away with any trickery in the face of this government order," he persisted laconically.

"Just a scrap of paper so far as the North Star is concerned," asserted Duff. "Legally it may be watertight from forty-nine different angles, but there's bound to be a fiftieth with a loop-hole in it that nobody ever thought of but the North Star Company. You knew, of course, that Gildersleeve sensed this very thing; that he left New York this last time with the express purpose of thwarting some nefarious plot the North Star were hatching up."

"No, I didn't know that." Winch appeared to be evincing a mild interest now. "Mr. Gildersleeve never even hinted at such a thing in his correspondence."

"That's just the trouble," complained the paper mill president. "Norman Gildersleeve didn't take any of us into his confidence with regard to his inside information and his definite plans, and when he dropped out of sight at this critical period he left us all helpless and in the dark."

"You are sure Mr. Gildersleeve had reason to suspect treachery on the part of the North Star?"

"I know this much: He employed two of the cleverest detectives in the country to run down something crooked afoot on the Nannabijou Limits. One of the detectives returned a broken-down wreck of a man; the other just dropped out of sight. His hat was found floating on a creek at the limits and that's all they ever heard of him afterwards. I do know that Gildersleeve got a line on something that means disaster for the Kam City Paper Mills if it is not thwarted in time."

Martin Winch drummed his fingers on the glass top of his desk and stared at the ceiling. "Yet I can't see that anything short of hiring some one to blow up the mill would accomplish such an end for the North Star," he observed skeptically.

"Which would be a crude, bolshevik method altogether lacking the finesse of the North Star. No, Winch, they're figuring on getting the machinery that's going into that mill of ours away from us for just what they'll care to pay when they have us with our backs to the wall. I'm becoming positive that's the objective of their plot."

"You must have deeper reasons for your suspicions than appear on the surface, Mr. Duff."

"I have. But, Good Lord, man, aren't the surface indications sufficient? Here's the North Star Company that once held exclusive cutting rights on all the available northern limits, docilely, tamely, allowing their initiative to pass into the hands of outside capital without even a murmur of protest. Tell me, does that look natural? It's all the more ominous because up to the eleventh hour of our securing permanent rights on the Nannabijou Limits they have fulfilled their part of the contract to the letter.

"Doesn't it strike you as passing strange that the North Star, which owned or controlled all the tugs and loading machinery on the upper end of the lake, accepted without even the slightest protest the government's proposal that they cut and deliver the required poles that would make our acquisition of the limits complete?"

"It did seem odd at the time," admitted the lawyer, "but then, they no doubt feared that obstruction of the government's policy might have meant another order ousting them from the limits at once."

"Nonsense! And you must know that's nonsense!"

Mr. Duff arose and paced the floor, jammed another unlighted cigar between his teeth and sat down again. "Winch," he suggested, "just let us take the whole situation as it obtains to date, stand it on end, so to speak, and take a square look at it. Then tell me if you still think the present lamblike attitude of the notorious North Star timber pirates looks natural.

"In the first place, the North Star at one time owned outright or held cutting rights on practically all the pulpwood contingent to water-haul from the North Shore, with the exception of the crown lands known as the Nannabijou Limits, didn't they? Well, back in those days the Ontario government had very little notion of the immense forest wealth of the North. The North Star got most of the concessions for a song, through political pull, graft, intimidation and downright theft in some cases. They bribed government officials right and left, moved survey lines overnight, had cruisers make false estimates, took out fake mining patents, and, on the pretence of cutting trails and tote roads in to mine sites that never existed, skinned the territory of all its best timber. They left a trail of commercial iniquity behind them, unparalleled on this continent, until it became a by-word that the North Star would rather win out by putting the law in contempt than accept a gift where everything was above board.

"The huge block of crown lands known as the Nannabijou Limits was the only territory held sacred from their nefarious exploitation. Government after government remained firm to the pledge of the late Sir John Whitson, when he was prime minister, that not a stick would be cut on the Nannabijou that was not manufactured into paper in Kam City.

"The North Star long had their covetous eyes on the Nannabijou Limits. They wanted them worse than any

other concession in the North, because they knew the Nannabijou, bisected as it is by a great river with tributaries extending for miles and miles inland, meant the domination of the pulp and paper industry once it was secured.

"But the North Star Company were exporters," continued Duff. "It is pretty well established that the North Star, controlled by Canadians whom no one has ever seemed able to name, owns two big paper mills in Eastern Ontario. They tried by every black artifice at their command to fleece the government for the Nannabijou and to get the embargo on export to the East in the raw state removed. But the government stood firm by the Whitson pledge and they failed in their attempts.

"Matters came swiftly to a head when we came on the scene and started to build a paper mill. The acute paper shortage had most to do with it. The government, tired of bickering and of the North Star's professional lobbyists, suddenly announced that it was going to throw the Nannabijou Limits open for tender, and that the limits would be leased to the highest bidder simultaneously contracting to manufacture exclusively in Kam City and have a paper mill with a capacity of three hundred and fifty tons of paper a day in full operation by October the twenty-third of this present year.

"It was a drastic contract, so drastic that only the serious paper famine threatening would excuse any government for creating it.

"Along with other Canadian associates holding stock in the International Investment Corporation, I went down to New York to consult Norman Gildersleeve, the president, about it. Gildersleeve went thoroughly into the cruisers' reports and the terms of the government agreement, and, to our surprise, almost immediately decided we should make a bid for the limits under all the

terms laid down. We had part of the machinery on order for some time which would equip just such a modern mill as was required, he pointed out, and the only problem that confronted us was the securing of tugs and loading machinery for handling the poles between the limits and the mill.

"Just what I expected took place. Immediately the North Star got busy building a paper mill on a site in Kam City, and they put in a tender for the limits simultaneously with ours.

"The North Star Company were the successful tenderers. They were granted a year's cutting rights with the privilege of renewing at the same figures provided they had commenced installing their machinery by June and were in full operation by October. Gildersleeve was not the least taken back. He said he expected it, but he told us to wait and see. You remember what happened. The North Star had no machinery to install in their mill by June. Gildersleeve and his associates put the skids under them by manipulating the market so that the United States plant manufacturing the North Star's paper-making machinery went into bankruptcy and our people gaining control of it held the machinery. That left the North Star nicely in the air. There wasn't another manufacturer could guarantee the construction of the machinery required in less than twenty-seven months' time, partially on account of the scarcity of steel at that time.

"The Hon. J. J. Slack and his bevy of lawyers moved heaven and earth to get the time extended to two years and six months, but the government stood pat. Our original tender was accepted to date from the expiration of the North Star's on October the twenty-third and we were to be given possession of all wood cut by the North Star this season on the Nannabijou. To appease the

powerful North Star Company, however, the government inserted a rider in the agreement that should we fail in any particular of our contract, even through unforeseen accident, our lease on the limits would be automatically cancelled and that of the North Star would be immediately reinstated with an extension of time for the installation of their machinery.

"Then followed our fight against the eleventh hour inclusion of that drastic rider. It was all to no avail. The government, having satisfied the public that they meant business in getting the limits developed and a paper mill built, were prepared to wash their hands of the whole affair. We were as much as told we could either take it or leave it, as we pleased.

"Now then, Winch," concluded Duff, "in the face of the North Star's immediate willingness to act as contractor for us in getting out the poles on time when they could otherwise have left us in a mighty awkward fix for tugs, can't you see that they have but one aim in this whole business?"

"You mean that—?"

"They have some definite plan for putting it over us so that we can't live up to the terms of our agreement with the government."

"But my dear Duff—"

"Hold on, I'm not crazy nor drunk either," insisted Duff. "I have definite information that it was just this very possibility that Norman Gildersleeve was on his way here to thwart when he dropped out of sight. To be candid with you, old man, I came up here purposely to-day just to mull this whole thing over aloud to see if I could get a slant on what Gildersleeve suspected or if you could supply a clue. I confess I'm just as much in the dark as ever as to what move the North Star could make between now and the twenty-third of October

to injure us. However, I have put a squad of guards on the booms in Nannabijou Bay to see that no trickery—”

III

The telephone bell interrupted Duff with an insistent jangling. Winch answered the call. “It’s Slack,” he said, placing a hand over the receiver. “He wants to talk to you.”

He passed the desk instrument to Duff. “Hello—yes, Duff speaking, Slack,” answered the latter. “Oh, I’ve been back in town since yesterday— Yes, it is unfortunate about Gildersleeve— No, nothing concerning him except what I’ve read in the papers— What’s that?— Yes, pretty busy— You are going out of town for a few days?— Well, right after you come back— Let me know and I’ll drop over— Thanks.”

Duff put up the phone. “Now, how the devil did he find out I was here?” he asked. “I left no word at the hotel nor at the plant as to where I was going. Wants to have a talk with me about something important right after he gets back from a trip to Ottawa.”

Duff rose and picked up his hat.

“Slack’s an oily customer,” commented Martin Winch stifling a sigh of relief that the interview with this fussy little man was over.

“Oily is the word, but I’m pretty well convinced he’s nothing more than a straw-boss at that,” returned Duff. “I’d give a mint of money, and so would a number of other people, to know who does Slack’s thinking for him.”

Duff departed in a finicky mood. A nasty doubt was growing within him as to the degree of co-operation he might expect from the Kam City Pulp and Paper Mills’ lawyer, a doubt engendered by Winch’s apathetic attitude.

No doubt Martin Winch, K.C., in common with many others, entertained a wholesome respect for the uncanny power of the North Star Company and its penchant for sooner or later squaring accounts with those who became over-zealous in meddling with its affairs. The disappearance of Norman T. Gildersleeve, head of the parent company controlling the Kam City Company, at this critical moment had more than likely shattered the initiative of Winch, who seemed to have small confidence in Duff's ability to cope single-handed with the cunning of the North Star. It might be, grimly speculated Duff, that Winch was seriously considering the matter of throwing up his retainer and allowing some other legal firm to appropriate the fee and the hazards that went with it.

CHAPTER IX

THE WONDER GIRL

I

THE first of the two surprises Louis Hammond experienced that evening he returned from the woods intending to take the tug to Kam City to interview Eulas Daly was that he was as good as marooned on the Nannabijou Limits. He sought out Mooney, the assistant superintendent, mentioning that he would like to secure a pass over to the city and back. Mooney issued most of the passes to the men travelling back and forward.

The assistant superintendent grinned wryly and shook his head. "You will have to see the Big Boss about it," he said and resumed his cursory inspection of pole counters' returns.

This was exceedingly aggravating, for the tug was almost ready to pull out and Acey Smith was not to be found. He did not show up at his office till long after the tug had gone out. Hammond followed him in, determined to secure a pass for the morning boat.

"I'd like to run over to the city on the tug in the morning," he announced. "Mooney told me I'd have to see you about getting a pass."

"I am very sorry to deny you your little holiday," returned the other, "but for the present I can do no more for you than Mooney."

"Then you are virtually making a prisoner of me?"

"I wouldn't say that; you voluntarily made a prisoner of yourself," reminded the superintendent. "You

brought me a letter from J. J. Slack, president of the North Star Company, instructing me to keep you hidden here—at least that is what I gathered from its contents—and until I receive other instructions I must abide by that request.”

Acey Smith spoke quietly, without trace of malice. The usual half-sneer on his lips was lacking. Hammond could not safely justify a denial that he was the protégé of Slack; his promise to Gildersleeve precluded that. There was nothing he could say.

The pulp camp superintendent seemed anxious to pass over the embarrassing situation, for he said almost immediately: “It’s a pity we have to work at cross-purposes, Hammond. Believe me, I hate to deny you such a small favour as a pass over to the city—but that, just now, is not exactly a possibility.”

“Thank you, Mr. Smith.” Hammond turned on a heel and strode out.

Acey Smith’s new mood baffled him. Undoubtedly, he reflected as he strolled down to the river before returning to his quarters, the superintendent was the creature of Slack or others of the company over him, but Gildersleeve must have realised this sort of thing would happen when he placed him on the limits through the agency of Slack. Was it all a sham of some sort—or was Gildersleeve actually in the first stages of madness when he concocted this seemingly crazy plan for Hammond to play the part of a fugitive from justice on the limits? Meanwhile, if Gildersleeve did not sooner or later turn up in his right mind where would it all end?

He must get to Kam City, even if he had to hide on one of the tugs, he decided. There would be little use in keeping up the present farce if Gildersleeve were unable to fulfill the part he planned, and, in the face of the fact that no trace of him had yet been discovered, that seemed

unlikely. There could be nothing wrong in disregarding an agreement with a man who was no longer able to carry out his side of the contract, and Eulas Daly, the United States consul, who had brought him into contact with Gildersleeve, should be able to let in a little light on the mystery. Then, if there appeared to be any use in so doing, he hoped he would be able to get back on one of the tugs without getting into undue complications and resume his old rôle at the limits.

II

“Sh-h-hish!”

Hammond's cogitation was startlingly interrupted by the faintly spoken warning as a figure leaned forward from the shadow of a clump of willows and seizing his nearest hand squeezed something small and square into the palm of it. “Don't look—walk on—some one might see,” came a low, hoarse whisper, then the other seemed to melt into the darkness.

Hammond took the cue from the unknown messenger and pursued his way to his quarters with an assumption of unconcern that he by no means possessed. The suddenness of it had considerably startled him. Sandy Macdougall was not yet in when Hammond arrived, and the latter, sitting close to the wall where his actions could not be observed from the outside through the window, examined the folded bit of paper which the stranger had pressed into his hand. It bore no address on the outside, and the faint scrawl in backhand on the inner side was unfamiliar:—

The young lady stopping on Amethyst Island, west of the camp, may need a friend. Why not stroll out that way to-morrow morning?

That was all. What the devil did it all mean?

The young lady referred to could be none other than the Girl with the High-arched Eyebrows— Hammond's fingers gripping the note trembled. He had several times started out for the vicinity of Amethyst Island, and each time at thought of actually meeting her turned back. Now—now, armed with this note, there would be a legitimate excuse—

At the sound of foot-steps outside he hurriedly folded the note and secreted it in an inner pocket.

Sandy Macdougall plunged in and tossed a newspaper to Hammond. "One of the scalers brought it in when he came over on the government launch to-night," he exclaimed. "See, this paper says that millionaire chap, Gildersleeve, that disappeared off a train has been seen in Montreal. Guess the gink must've been celebrating with a crock of bootleg hootch and passed his station, eh?"

Hammond hastily read the headlines and the story which told of a man of Norman T. Gildersleeve's appearance being seen boarding a train west at the Windsor street station, Montreal. That was about all there was to it. He tossed the paper down in disgust. As an ex-newspaper man he could thoroughly appreciate the avidity with which correspondents and telegraph editors seize upon every tittle of rumour while a big unsolved mystery grips the public's mind.

"Sandy," he said, speaking his thoughts, "I'm beginning to think there's something in all that you were telling me this morning."

The cook paused in the act of lighting his pipe. "Anything happened to make you believe that?" he asked casually.

"No," replied Hammond, "but I have had proof that I am being shadowed around here, though by whom I haven't a faint idea."

Macdougall with ready generosity produced the revolver and a box of cartridges. "You'd better pack these," he advised.

But Hammond had all a journalist's contempt for firearms. "Thanks, Sandy," he declined. "I'd rather win through without it. I haven't carried a gun since—"

"You left the army," supplied the cook when Hammond paused cautiously. "I knew you'd been over there too. Why don't you wear your service button on the outside of your coat same as I do? The Big Boss, for all he don't let on, has got a weakness for returned men."

"I'm sleepy, let's turn in," said Hammond.

He wasn't really sleepy, but he wanted a chance to think quietly. The truth of the matter was the young man viewed that note that had been poked into his hand with considerable suspicion. He did not know whether to conceive that the intent was to lead him into some sort of a trap or make a laughing-stock of him. In any case, he was going to see the matter through.

Next morning he dressed with more than usual care, and when he had breakfasted sauntered out one of the inland tote roads. Out of sight of the camp, he cut down through the solid woods until he reached the lake-shore trail, where he crossed the Nannabijou River by way of the wooden suspension bridge built there by the Indian workers.

It was a laughing autumn morning, crisp, with that mellow sunlit stillness that prevails during the period in the latter part of September and the earlier weeks in October before the first great "blow" comes hurtling down along Superior's north shore oft-times taking its grisly toll of men and boats. There was an invigorating tang of spruce in the air, and the mighty lake to Hammond's left lay like a great shimmering sea of glass. Afar out on it grain carriers rode lazily, trailing their

long, black plumes north and south. In the brush to either side of the trail partridge strutted noisily or drummed up into the peaks of the evergreens. In the soft blue of the skies and the thin haze of the horizons hung that infinite serenity of mid-autumn in the majestic North.

Hammond forgot about the ruses he had planned to discover if he were shadowed. The very gladness of Nature round and about him made him whistle and sing like a boy, for all that a certain shy nervousness was upon him. Such a morning breeds recklessness in vigorous youth—a quest for Adventure and Old Romance.

He topped a long slope, from which the trail dipped gradually to the very edge of the lake at the foot of a wide ravine gashed up the side of the mountain to his right to the plateau below the forbidding black granite battlements of the Cup of Nannabijou. Almost on his immediate left lay the tiny Island of Amethyst with its soft wooded groves and grotesque, old-fashioned bungalows.

Hammond's eyes swept from the island to the shoreline opposite—then he stopped dead in his tracks with a sharp intaking of breath.

Seated upon a fallen tree-trunk near the water's edge where her canoe was drawn up, with the lake and the dense foliage above and around her for a background, was a young woman whose charm of face and figure held him for the moment in spellbound admiration.

It was the Girl with the High-arched Eyebrows; she whom he had now twice met under unusual circumstances, once in the parlour car of a transcontinental train and again just below the doorway of Acey Smith's office at the pulp camp. She was obviously waiting for some one. So—so—could it have been that she had actually sent for him?

She was looking straight at him, expectancy, wonder in her great blue eyes. With an effort he regained part of his composure and plunged precipitously down the trail against a wild impulse to turn on his heel and flee.

Somehow, he finally stood before her with bared head and wildly-beating pulse.

"I—I came in response to your note." He did not stammer it so awkwardly as he feared he would.

"My note?" The finely-pencilled brows were elevated in bewitching perplexity. "*My* note?"

"Yes—the note you—I have it here somewhere." Hammond at first searched vainly through his pockets for the tiny bit of paper. He felt he was somehow making a confounded ass of himself.

"But I—I wrote you no note. There must be some mistake." There was the faintest trace of amused curiosity in her tones.

Hammond suddenly felt like one who drops from the clouds into a pit of gloom. Either he had been humbugged or he had accosted the wrong woman.

III

At last his fingers encountered the little folded square. He opened it out and passed it to her. "You see it was unsigned," he explained. "I was not in a position to know who it was from—"

He was cut short by a soft peal of silvery laughter. "Some one with an odd sense of humour is behind this," she said passing the note back to him. "But the joke is on both of us."

"On both of us?"

"Yes. Last night I too found a note pushed under the door of my cottage. It stated that a young man who was stopping at the pulp camp would like to meet me here

this morning, and that if I honoured the appointment it might be to our mutual interest. So you see I obeyed the mysterious summons."

"The notes then were most likely written by the same party."

"Most likely. Mine was in a faint, back-hand scrawl."

"Some outside party," he suggested, "must have been seriously interested in our becoming acquainted."

"One would fancy so." There came a mischievous light into her blue eyes. "But we are not yet acquainted, are we, Mr. ———?"

"Hammond—Louis Hammond," he supplied.

"Mr. Hammond, I am pleased to meet you." She rose and extended her little hand. "I am Miss Josephine Stone—or, perhaps you already knew?"

"No—but I confess I have been curious to know, ever since that night our eyes met on the train, or do you remember that?"

"Oh, yes—I do. You must have thought my actions strange that night. But there were so many odd things happened in that coach during the space of a few minutes I had become quite perplexed."

"That brings us to a point where you might do me a great service, Miss Stone," Hammond suggested eagerly. "Have you any idea what happened Mr. Gildersleeve?"

"Mr. Gildersleeve?" There was blank perplexity in her face.

"Then, you do not know him?"

"No, I do not remember ever having met a man of that name."

Hammond was dumfounded. "Pardon me, then," he offered. "I had thought you were a relative—or his secretary."

"Was he one of the men you were talking to on the coach?"

"Yes. Mr. Gildersleeve, so the papers say, disappeared after leaving the train at Moose Horn Station that night."

"Oh—I remember reading something about that in some of the papers brought over to the island. Was he the tall, stern-faced man who left his stateroom and got off at a little station shortly after you left him?"

"That was Mr. Gildersleeve."

"I thought there was something mysterious about it all," she said seriously. "I had been travelling with a friend, Mrs. Johnson, from Calgary. From Winnipeg east we were occupying a section in one of the other coaches, but I had gone back to the parlour car alone to read for awhile before I went to bed. Shortly afterwards, a dark, striking-looking woman came in and took a chair near me. We were alone at the time and I noticed she seemed to be keeping a keen watch on the stateroom of the man you say was Mr. Gildersleeve. First, there was a little grey-haired man went in."

"That was Eulas Daly, an American consul," explained Hammond.

"After he came out you later came up from the forward part of the coach and entered Mr. Gildersleeve's stateroom," continued Miss Stone. "When the door closed behind you, the dark woman leaned over and asked: 'Do you know that man?' I replied that I did not. Then she said: 'His appearance fits the description of a notorious western bandit. I am one of the number of detectives who are shadowing him, so please don't tell anybody what you see me doing.'"

"Before I could recover from my surprise she tip-toed to the stateroom and stood with her back to it and her hands behind her. At first I thought she was simply

waiting for you to come out. But when some little time later the porter came up the aisle she hastily withdrew her hands and I saw she had been holding against the door's key-hole a small black boxlike instrument."

"A dictaphone!" Hammond gasped.

"That's what I took it to be. She kept it hidden from the porter and walked forward and out of the coach. When you came out of Mr. Gildersleeve's room I wanted to tell you about the woman's strange actions, but you took one startled look at me and fled."

"Thus confirming the allegation that I was a highwayman," Hammond laughed.

"I did not know what to think," asserted Miss Stone. "After Mr. Gildersleeve left the train I saw you come out of the smoker and walk out to the platform. I summoned all my courage and followed as far as the platform door. It was some time before I succeeded in catching your eye. Then when I did I lost my nerve and ran away without warning you."

"And you would have warned me—even when there was a possibility that I was a real desperado?"

Her eyes dropped before his ardent ones. "Sometimes," she replied deliberately, "one's sympathies *will* go out to—a desperado."

For the moment Hammond almost wished himself a highwayman, but whatever his reply might have been it was stilled on his lips.

From out of the heart of the hills came a melodious, gong-like alarum, softly reverberating like the tone when exquisite cut-glass is struck.

The man looked at the girl. In her eyes he read as great bewilderment as his own.

CHAPTER X

THE WHITE MONSTER OF NANNABIJOU

I

A GAIN, after a short interval, the strange gong sounded while the pair stood speechless at the water's edge. There was something terrifying in its low note as it vibrated out of the early morning stillness of the wilderness. It had seemed to cry out a protest against intrusion in some fastness sanctuary—a warning of ominous things.

"Now where do you suppose that bell is located?" Hammond was first to speak.

"I haven't the faintest idea," Josephine Stone answered. He could see she was suppressing apprehension under her light laughter. "I have heard it before, and it has startled—puzzled me."

"Perhaps there is an Indian mission of some sort back in those hills," he suggested, though it struck him it sounded more like a huge gong than a church bell.

The girl shook her head dubiously. "I don't believe there's a soul living up there," she asserted. "Back of here is all barren lands."

"But there seems to be a well worn trail running up from here," Hammond indicated. "Have you ever explored it?"

"No, but I've wanted to just to find out where that bell is. Mrs. Johnson is afraid we'd get lost in the bush and wouldn't consent to going unless one of our Indians went with us. The Indians get excited even at mention

of it; they say they are afraid of an evil spirit that has its abode in those cliffs they call the Cup of Nannabijou. I'd never have the courage to go alone."

To Hammond there came a thrilling possibility. "Would you care to go up there—with me?"

She looked out over the expanse of lake anxiously and glanced at her wrist-watch. "No, not to-day. I find I must be returning to the island." Then as she rose she looked up at him with a smile that dissipated his twinge of disappointment; "But you will come again, Mr. Hammond? Perhaps some morning we can arrange it."

II

Hammond did come again—almost every morning when the weather was clear. They spent most of the time in her launch or one of the canoes, trolling for lake trout and coasters or exploring the many fantastic inlets along the North Shore. On some occasions Mrs. Johnson, Miss Stone's companion, accompanied them, but most of the time they went alone, the elder woman not caring for the water. Of her past or her reason for staying at Amethyst Island at this season of the year the girl never spoke. Twice Hammond mentioned Acey Smith, the superintendent of the pulp camps, and of the latter's strange behaviour, but each time Miss Stone adroitly changed the subject. But these aspects did not weigh heavily upon Louis Hammond; he was too happy in her company. What he most dreaded was an announcement that she would be leaving.

In the thrall of his new adventure he ceased to worry over the mystery of his mission to the limits or as to what had become of Norman T. Gildersleeve. Of Acey Smith he saw as little as possible. If Smith objected to his visits to Josephine Stone at the island he said no

word about it; but once when Hammond was striking off along the lakeshore trail he turned to glimpse the Big Boss of the Nannabijou camps staring after him, a black scowl on his face that spoke volumes.

There came the morning when they were to make the ascent to the Cup of Nannabijou. He found her waiting for him by the fallen tree-trunk attired in a blue riding coat, fawn riding bloomers and high, laced tan walking boots, a costume that set off to advantage the indescribable charm of her.

She greeted him with a quaint shyness. "They told me it would be impossible to get through the woods in skirts," she said.

"Why of course it would." His frank, boyish admiration was reassuring. "I should have told you that myself."

For all her fragile, girlish form he found her agile and strong as a young deer, and in her close-fitting costume and firm-soled walking boots she seemed quite as tireless as he. They spoke but little, for the ascent was fairly steep, and a few hundred yards from the lakeshore it became almost precipitous in places. At times the trail went up anglewise in a series of steps across the face of cliffs; then for a space they would travel over gentle slopes of heavily wooded territory. Always she kept to his side with a companionable nearness that made him utterly forget the toil of the climb. Over the very steep places she accepted his arm.

The trail took them to the summit of a bald hump of ages-old lava rock shaped like the top of a huge beehive. From there the view in the crystal northern sunlight was magnificent. Before them stretched the valley of Solomon Creek, and along the base of the cliffs a translucent ribbon of mist disclosed the tortuous course of the stream down to where the vapour expanded into

a great spade-shaped cloud above the lake formed by a beaver-dam near the creek's confluence with the Nannabijou River. Close-packed along the leaden thread of the stream the evergreen forests stood like spell-struck hosts in a mystic communion of silence. Beyond the creek the frowning black cliffs of the Cup of Nannabijou rose into dizzy space like impregnable walls and battlements of a giant's castle. Nowhere in the semicircle of those cliffs could Hammond discern sign of a draw or even a path that a goat could climb.

The pair traversed the valley and crossed the creek over a bridge built of unbarked cedar logs. At the base of the cliffs the trail turned sharply to the left and followed the course of the creek upwards for about an eighth of a mile. There it again swung through the thick-grown green stuff, this time to the right, disclosing a hidden draw in the cliffs. They could no longer see the creek, but they could hear its murmur somewhere to their left.

Suddenly out of the sunlit upper air there came a sullen rumble of thunder that died away in the most sinister of echoes. The girl clutched Hammond's arm. "I am really getting frightened," she whispered.

"Oh, that's only an echo of sound waves caught from dear knows where in this chasm," he assured her. "This no doubt is the entrance to the Cup."

They pushed on, up and up. Though fairly steep the trail was well-worn and clean-going. Soon they found themselves out of the woods but shut in by high rock walls. The aisle through the living rock finally ended abruptly, but to their left yawned the opening of a man-high tunnel along which the trail apparently continued. From out of this came the low thunder of waterfalls and the swishing purl and splash of rapids.

Then, above them this time it seemed, they heard the

melodious alarum of the mysterious gong. The rumble of rapids grew fainter and fainter and finally almost died away.

"Do you think we should go on?" the girl asked anxiously.

"Let's go to the edge of the creek anyway," he suggested. "It must be at the other end of this tunnel."

Josephine Stone looked up the towering black walls that hemmed them in like a prison. "It makes one think," she said, "that there might be something in the Indian superstition that an awful spirit presides in these cliffs."

"Nothing to that," laughed Hammond, "but the fruit of poor Lo's untutored mind and his over-active imagination."

But this carefree young man little dreamed of the grim guardian of the way to the Cup which kept inviolable the secrets beyond the cliffs—a white monster, which, once unleashed, could not be recalled by its masters till it had wreaked its will to destroy.

They were both soon to learn something of it in a manner most startling.

III

The tunnel, as Hammond had conceived, was short. Its sepulchral gloom ended on open air at the very edge of what seemed to have been the bed of a mountain torrent, and, though only the tiniest of streams trickled down the centre of it, its sides were glistening with moisture as though swept very recently by rushing waters. On the further side rose an unbroken wall of rock.

"Oh, please don't venture any further, Mr. Hammond," pleaded Josephine Stone tremulously.

"Not to-day," agreed Hammond, "but I just want to drop down and have a look up this stream-bed. Unless

I miss my guess it is the pass that leads into the Cup."

Suiting action to his words, he let himself down to the first of a series of natural stone steps on the side of the stream-bed.

His foot no sooner touched the step than the tunnel back of them was flooded with a wicked green flash, blinding in its intensity. Simultaneously, from above, in the towering cliffs of Nannabijou came a single reverberating, gonglike note. Followed a low, vibrating rumble which merged into a thunderous roaring and crashing increasing every second in volume as if the whole mountainside were tumbling down upon them.

Hammond felt the girl grip convulsively at his coat sleeve as she cried out. He drew back into the tunnel.

There was a hiss and whine of flying rock particles; then a raging, white-foaming flood, filling the stream-bed almost to its brim, swept by like a monster thing of life. The empty, silent channel was transformed in the twinkling of an eye into a mountain torrent, absolutely impassable, ready to hurl to death any living thing in its path.

The way to the Cup of Nannabijou had been effectually sealed.

"Come," cried the girl, "let us leave this terrible place."

Hammond sprang to her side and they hurried out through the tunnel and down through the pass in the rock to the trail in the woods. Not until they had crossed the bridge over the creek did Josephine Stone pause to speak. Her face was pale and Hammond noted with alarm she was all a-tremble.

"Oh, that rushing water!" She gasped. "The lightning—and that man!"

"Man?"

"Yes. You didn't see him. But I did—his face at the other end of the tunnel—in the lightning flash."

"What did he look like? Where did he go?"

"He was an Indian—he seemed to fade out of sight like a spirit."

There flashed on Hammond memory of what Sandy Macdougall had told him about an Indian shadowing him, but he said lightly: "Likely some idle Indian following us out of curiosity."

Josephine Stone shook her head. "There is something wicked and mysterious about the Cup of Nannabijou," she contended. "They say men have gone up there and never been seen again. I should not have let you attempt to get down into that stream-bed."

"I might have had a narrow squeak if I had attempted it a minute or so sooner," he reflected. Then: "By the way, if I may ask, how long do you expect to remain at Amethyst Island?"

"That I can hardly say—it all depends." She hesitated. "It may be a couple of weeks and it may be more, but I hope to get away before the bitter weather sets in."

Her face had suddenly become grave. He could sense that allusion to her business in this wild part of Canada, whatever it might be, distressed her, so he dropped the subject for less personal matters.

When they finally came out upon the lakeshore at the foot of the trail the girl stayed him with a hand upon his arm. "This is where we must part to-day," she said looking anxiously along the beach.

He did not question her evident haste to leave him. "When may I come again?" he asked.

"Any time." Softly. "To-morrow, if it's nice."

She was standing with her little white hand extended. He looked down into those wondrous blue orbs with their warm light—and was lost. His right hand closed over her fingers and his left went about her little shoulders and swept her to him.

"Josephine!"

She gasped frightenedly, suppressing a startled cry. "Not yet—not here," she pleaded.

"That was unfair of me," he started to say, but he did not release her. "I—"

"Not if you—you hurry." The significance of her low whisper was tantalising.

His arms closed her to him. This time her face rose to his, the long, silky lashes drooping under those divinely arched brows. His lips found the warm, velvety caress of hers. He felt her tremble like a prisoned bird in his arms.

There came to them the sound of footfalls and a rasping of steel boot-hobs on the rock up the trail. The girl pressed him from her, wide, genuine alarm in her eyes. "You must go—quickly," she urged.

"Then until we meet again—Josephine—good-bye," he whispered.

"Good-bye—Louis."

He flung off along the lakeshore trail. But at a sound he stopped in the screen of evergreens.

The low-hanging branches of the balsams parted at the mouth of the other trail and a great figure of a man, immaculate, faultless in his tartan mackinaw, corduroy riding breeches and knee-high white elk bush boots, stepped out upon the sands of the beach.

The newcomer doffed his soft narrow-brimmed stetson hat with the grace and courtliness of a knight of old.

Acey Smith!

The deviltry that invariably lurked about the lumberman's pale, handsome face was masked in the blandest of smiles.

"Good-morning, Miss Stone." His greeting had a low, rich quality of music in it that bespoke the cultured gentleman Hammond conceived him not to be. The

magical effect of his presence on the young woman gave Hammond his first poignant twinge of jealousy.

"I hope I did not keep you waiting long," she offered, going forward to meet him. "I was away for a long walk this morning."

"Up the hill?"

She nodded.

His face grew grave. "I thought I told you you must not go up the hill alone," he chided. "It's dangerous country."

"Oh, but I wasn't alone." She paused, but his face gave no inkling of surprise. "Only I over-stayed my time and I was afraid I kept you waiting."

"I wasn't in the least inconvenienced," he replied. "Shall we go down to your favourite seat now?"

She tripped to his side and they sauntered along the beach toward Amethyst Island.

It was quite beneath Louis Hammond to play the part of eavesdropper, though a curiosity akin to jealousy as to what the Big Boss of the Nannabijou Camps and Josephine Stone could have in common was fairly burning him up. He swung resolutely away in the opposite direction—for the camp.

His thoughts were in a mighty whirl. But withal they were pleasant thoughts—deliriously pleasant.

He had held in his arms Josephine Stone, she whom he had dreamed of so long as the Girl with the High-arched Eyebrows—had kissed her—yes, had been kissed by her in return. Hammond was astounded over his own enterprise as a lover.

When such a woman suffered a man to kiss her on the mouth, he swore to himself, she must—must hold him in a regard higher than any other man. It therefore did not matter about Acey Smith.

Such a woman he could trust!

But had Hammond been a witness to what took place on the beach after he left he assuredly would not have been so easy of mind. He might have been turned white-hot with jealousy.

Or, being the sound philosopher that he was, in spite of his youth, he might have reasoned that under stress of certain circumstances the best of women will do strange things.

CHAPTER XI

CAPTAIN CARLSTONE, V. C.

I

JOSEPHINE STONE did not look back after Acey Smith led her down the lakeshore from the spot where she had parted with Louis Hammond. She knew Hammond would neither attempt to follow them nor spy upon them from a distance. Perhaps too she was pre-occupied with the tensivity of new sensations she did not quite understand. Had she been inclined to mental analysis she might have contrasted the reactions upon herself the presence of the two men brought about; the one frank, buoyant, purposeful and full of the verve and enthusiasm of youth—the other in the prime of his vigour; masterful, grimly fascinating under his cloak of mystery and conscious power.

What discerning, womanly woman is not drawn irresistibly by the type of men who curb tremendous potentialities under a poise that outwardly bespeaks merely good form and the niceties of the occasion? It was not "side" with this man; it was patent he was what he was for a definite purpose. More, to the sensitive intuition of Josephine Stone there appealed from out of the deeps of the personality of Acey Smith a great latent tragedy—a something persistently repressed by that fatalistic mouth that could set so grim and straight—a something that smouldered at times in his brooding eyes and flickered ever so elusively over the face he had taught to be a cold, cruel mask.

If she did not analyse, she at least felt these things in her feminine way. It was this impression, perhaps, that impelled her to say as they strolled to the log seat by the whispering surf: "Sometimes, Mr. Smith, this place seems to me like an enchanted forest—like a dream inset in the prosaic course of everyday life."

"Does it appeal to you that way, Miss Stone?" He led her to the log seat and dropped down near her. "Strange, isn't it, how some life-incidents flicker by us with all the glamour of a dream—leaving us wondering, in a floundering sort of way, if it wasn't a fleeting mirage, so to speak, from some other existence."

"You express it so wonderfully! You think then that all of us have experienced previous existences on this or some other sphere?"

"Some of us—perhaps."

"You have felt *that* here then, the same as I?"

"I have." Acey Smith lit a cigarette. "You may laugh at the conceit, but at times I could fancy the feel of a basket sword-hilt at my side, the rap-rap of its scabbard-end on my heels and even the jingle of spurs on my boots. Yet, what I believe—"

He broke off and laughed scornfully at his own confession. "What nonsense to be boring you with, Miss Stone!"

"But it's not nonsense, and you're not boring me. You must go on," she commanded, "even if I have to first confess that I have heard the clanking of your knightly sword, the jingling of your spurs—yes, and even felt at my cheek for the beauty-patch I fancied was there."

His glance met hers, swiftly. If she were merely acting she was intense about it.

"I was going to say that what I believe is that it is a fleeting glimpse of the ideal we experience at such times, and imagination does the rest," he continued.

"Most of us are composites of two or more personalities. Fate, or circumstances if you prefer, decrees which of those personalities shall flourish; the others, like the sucker-shoots of yonder mountain ash tree, aspire but never attain perfection. There is always the Man That Is and the Man That Might Have Been. Saint or sinner, philosopher or fool, there comes sooner or later a time when the Man That Might Have Been insists on life and triumph for his little day."

"But doesn't the choice of personality lie pretty much with the man himself?" she argued. "You know they say that every man is the architect of his own fortune."

"Strong men are ever the playthings of Destiny," he replied. "So-called masterful men stifle their true selves and accept the rôle that Fate has ordained alone shall carry them to their goal."

"That's cynicism."

"Must the truth always be sugar-coated? It's an impression."

"You speak out of an experience?"

"More or less." Frankly.

Josephine Stone plunged boldly. "Then, for instance," she suggested, "the man they call Acey Smith might have been whom?"

"Quite another personality by quite another name."

"You believe there is something in a name?"

"I do and I do not, Miss Cross-examiner," he answered enigmatically. "Napoleon might have been born Dick Jones, but in such a case the world would have found another name to call him by."

She laughed over the allusion. "But you are drifting away from the subject, Mr. Witness," she reminded. "I asked you about Acey Smith's Man That Might Have Been."

"He was a dreamer of high-minded dreams and a

scholar; the man Fate shaped and willed should survive was merely him they call Acey Smith the timber pirate."

"But this Man That Might Have Been." There was deep concern in her tones. "You could have made him, and you could yet—by the sheer force of your will—make him a reality."

His black eyes were drawn to hers, and, momentarily, she thought she saw the soul of another man—another who was not Acey Smith. But the softened light in them as quickly changed to a hardened glint.

"No, no," he said harshly, "that man can never be. I am fighting him off—have been fighting him since—" His gaze swerved from hers as his jaw clicked the balance: "—since you came. His advent now—would mean disaster. I found him too late."

Anything she might have added was negated by his changed attitude, a field of reserve, of isolation, he threw around himself at will. "With your permission," he urged, "we will drop the personal topic with which I have been egotistically monopolising your time. You intimated at our last meeting that you had finally decided to tell me why it was so essential you should meet J.C.X."

"Oh, yes," she admitted. "I think I told you there was a very personal matter concerned outside of the unexplained reason for the head of the North Star Company asking me to come here. It was this: A man known as J.C.X. knew something of the affairs of my grandfather, Joseph Stone, a mining prospector, who lived and died in this north country somewhere."

"Then you knew of the existence of J.C.X. before you received his letter?"

"Yes, through the rather vague statements about J.C.X., the North Star Company and my grandfather made in a field hospital during the great war by a

Canadian named Captain Carlstone while in a delirium caused by shell-shock."

"Yes?" If there was a shock of surprise in this disclosure, Acey Smith's features did not register it.

"The rest was all conjecture," Josephine Stone went on. "But let me first tell you the story of Captain Carlstone. When you have heard it you will be the better able to understand my curiosity in the matter."

II

"It is not a long story," she began. "The military career of Captain Carlstone was meteoric—he flashed into the thick of things from nobody knew where and disappeared in the fog of war as mysteriously.

"I was one of the first contingent of nurses who accompanied the Canadian forces to the front," she continued. "I never had the privilege of meeting the wonderful captain, but everybody in the —th division heard of him and his dare-devil exploits. He was not only noted for his bravery but for an almost superhuman cunning and resourcefulness. The men fairly worshipped him. I nursed wounded soldiers who swore they would cheerfully walk into the mouth of hell behind Captain Carlstone and declared that to die fighting by the side of such a man would be the height of glory.

"With his superior officers, however, he was not so popular. They were jealous of the handsome, dare-devil captain, who seemed himself to devise obstacles against further promotion. At the battle of Vimy Ridge he won the Victoria Cross, and he might have had higher promotion as well but for a sarcastic remark made publicly that he valued the companionship of his boys more than any 'dug-out office' they could give him.

"Captain Carlstone was a mystery man whose previous

history none knew beyond the facts that he enlisted in the West early in the war and won first a promotion from the ranks to lieutenant and then to captain on the field. He was very dark-complexioned—so dark it was generally conceded he had Indian blood in him or a foreign strain from some remote ancestor in Canada. Some were inclined to the belief that he was fighting under an assumed name.

“Captain Carlstone seemed to bear a charmed life. He was always where the fighting was heaviest and came out unscathed until his last memorable engagement, when, with a picked body of men, he captured a strategic position in a clump of woods the enemy was holding. He was to have had further honours for that, but they brought him from the wood in a state of coma induced by shell-shock.

“He was conveyed to a base hospital where he came out of the stupor a raving maniac. His complete recovery came with that remarkable suddenness that sometimes characterised such cases, but the morning following the day he became normal he was not in his cot. Not a clue to his whereabouts was ever afterwards discovered. He was one of the unsolved mysteries of the war.

“Now then, Mr. Smith, we come to the point where I became so personally interested in locating J.C.X.,” concluded Josephine Stone. “While in the base hospital Captain Carlstone was under the care of an old chum of mine, Sister Cummings. It was she who afterwards told me of the vivid story he related during his ravings of the death of Joseph Stone, my grandfather, on a northern trail years ago. Alternately, he talked of a mine and a will, most of it incoherent, but—”

Josephine Stone paused. Acey Smith was gazing fixedly beyond her into the thicket above, but at her

cognisance of it the alertness in his features relaxed in a whimsical smile and his eyes came back to a level with hers.

"It seemed almost an unbelievable coincidence when I received the letter signed by J.C.X., asking me to come here to learn something of interest to myself," continued the girl.

Again Acey Smith flashed an apprehensive glance at the woods above. "Come," he urged, "we'll go down to the open space on the beach."

She had heard nothing and could discern no sign of life where his eyes had been focussed. Nevertheless, she accompanied him without question down the beach out of earshot of the woods.

He turned to her. "Your grandfather died when you were a child?" he asked.

"When I was two years of age, yes. He was by hobby a scientific man and a recluse, I believe, but he did considerable prospecting. My father was an only son, and, after the death of my grandmother, he insisted on father leaving the wilds. There followed a heated dispute which led my father to leave never to return. He seldom spoke of grandfather, and mother and I learned only the most fragmentary details of him and his life. Father died before I started to school and mother passed away a few years later, leaving me quite alone in the world, and had it not been for an invention of father's, purchased on a royalty basis after his death by a manufacturing firm, I might also have been left quite penniless."

"You never learned definitely just what happened your grandfather?"

"No. There were rumours reached us that he was killed by Indians in the bush and that rival prospectors had made away with him after he had discovered a gold

mine. But none of these stories seemingly were ever confirmed.

"All my life I've wanted to learn about grandfather and what happened him," she went on. "Though I had never known him it seemed as though he was very near to me—as if actually I had been in his dying thoughts. I had intended to explain all this to you that first night I went to your office, but—I was at first—afraid of you. Since then—"

"Yes?" he urged as she hesitated.

"Since I've felt instinctively you knew what I came to seek and you would find a way. I know now I could trust you."

III

She looked up at him. His eyes did not meet hers and she was unprepared for the answer he gave her: "If you had asked sixty people, forty-nine who know me best would have told you you had better put your trust in Mephistopheles himself."

She caught her breath. "But that—that is because they do not know you intimately."

"It is because they know me *too* intimately—the reputation is not unmerited."

There was a bitter indifference to his words that chilled her, a drooping sneer at his mouth and a cold gleam in his black eyes as he made frank, unboastful admission of iniquity. It seemed for a space as though the demon he had confessed looked out mockingly from the man at her.

"Yet you made no mistake," he assured her almost immediately. "Your woman's intuition told you aright; there is that I must assist you to learn of, even if—if I did not care."

"But about Captain Carlstone," she reminded him.

"You have not told me whether he has any connection with the matter or not."

"Captain Carlstone does not matter. He is gone—made away with himself somewhere overseas."

"Killed himself?" she asked aghast.

Acey Smith gave vent to a soulless, soundless laugh. "Something like that," he answered indifferently. "At any rate, he never came back to Canada. There were vital reasons why he dare not. But don't waste pity on him; as I said, he doesn't matter, and, lest you may have conceived otherwise, I may tell you there was never anything in common between Captain Carlstone and J.C.X. In fact, they were as unlike as it is possible for two individuals to be."

His utter callousness bruised the sensitive girl—angered her so that she could have wished to have been a man to strike him where he stood.

"Be patient for a little while." He intercepted the retort that trembled on her lips. "You shall know and you shall understand. You shall be the first person outside myself to meet face to face the mysterious J.C.X., whose power is greater than any other one individual in the Dominion of Canada, who makes and unmakes big businesses at his will, sways big men as puppets, uses political parties as pawns to his own advantage, advises and the Press thunders his words, and yet works as with an unseen hand. You shall be the first to meet J.C.X. and know definitely in whose presence you stand."

"I don't think I care to meet him—now," coldly.

"But you wanted to know about your grandfather."

"You mean he alone can tell me?"

"No, J.C.X. could tell you nothing of that. But it is through your coming meeting with him that you will learn all that you seek to know and more."

"But why all this intense mystery about it?" Jo-

sephine Stone plucked up courage to demand. "I confess I am at a greater loss now than ever to know what all these complications mean—where they lead to."

There came frank concern into his face. "I only wish it were in my power to tell you—now," he said. "But it is out of my province to say more. In a week, or likely less, the appointed time will arrive."

"Meanwhile, I have to go east on urgent business," he added. "I will return as quickly as possible, but before I go I am going to ask you if you will put yourself in my care without question as to the reasons."

"You mean to leave here—with you?"

"Exactly. Oh, but you may bring your chaperon, Mrs. Johnson, with you. It will be all perfectly proper. Only, I must ask you to leave without notifying a soul, not even your Indian servants. There's a reason."

"A reason? Another unexplained reason?"

"No, I may tell you this time. I fear for your safety during the next few days while I am away."

"But I am not afraid."

"That's because you do not sense your danger."

"From what?"

"An enemy."

"An enemy?" she echoed. "Who?"

"The one who despatched notes to yourself and young Hammond to bring about your first meeting here."

"Come," he urged before the exclamation of surprise died on her lips. "Say you will go to-night. I'll come over in the motorboat this evening and we can make the arrangements. It is vital that you should leave here at once and without any one knowing or I would not ask it."

"Without notifying my friends?"

She read from his keen answering glance that he knew

she was thinking of Hammond. "Without notifying any one," he insisted.

"Then I refuse to go."

"That is final?"

"It is, unless I can be shown a more coherent reason for going in such a manner."

The worried look that had come into his face receded and he laughed a queer, bitter, little laugh. "Oh, well, if you *will* have it so, it is up to me to change my plans," he said. "And that being so, I must bid you good-bye until I return from Montreal."

"Oh, by the way," he added, "if you should hear men striking camp up the trail along the lakeshore this evening don't be alarmed. It will be merely a squad of the mounted police who've come to patrol this section of the waterfront during the strike."

"Strike?" she echoed perplexed.

He walked up the beach, drew his cached packsack from a clump of green stuff and returned. "Yes, we're to have one of those modern luxuries in the camp within the next few days," he answered.

He lifted his hat, whirled on a heel and was away.

In a maze of doubt as to whether her recent refusal to leave the island as he had requested were a wise decision, she watched Acey Smith go up and over the first hill of the lakeshore trail. When his figure had disappeared she was assailed by a sudden apprehension—an overwhelming apprehension—that she had made a grave mistake. There must have been deep, very deep reasons for his asking her to leave the island. No doubt she was imperilling not only her own safety but his plans as well.

On an impulse she sped forward after him. She felt that she could easily get within call of him before he

reached the crown of the second hill. In her close-fitting garments she made fast time, but on the top of the first hill she paused all out of breath. The trail before her down through the valley and up the further rise was silent and empty.

At a tramping sound in the brush to her left she hesitated about proceeding. It might be a wandering bear or moose.

The bushes up the trail parted and a fearsome figure strode out—a figure as forbidding as one might well conceive an evil spirit to be. His face was almost black and on his cheek-bones stood out two livid red gashes. He wore no head-covering save a band of purple which held a single eagle's feather in place in his lank, black hair. Round his neck were hung string upon string of gleaming white wolves' teeth.

At the girl's involuntary cry of dismay he whirled, the whites of his evil black eyes showing garishly in his satanic visage. It afterwards recurred to her that he had at first appeared quite as startled as she had been, but he almost immediately straightened, and, folding his arms on his chest, pronounced himself in deep, strangely-vibrating guttural tones.

"Ogima Bush," he said, "big Medicine Man. Him no hurt white lady. *Un-n-n-n*—white lady pass."

But Josephine Stone waited to have no further parley. She turned and fled on trembling limbs back toward the island. And, as she ran, there fell upon her ears a penetrating, wailing cry, long-drawn-out and blood-curdling in its mixture of mockery and despair—a cry that for subsequent reasons she was destined to remember all the days of her life.

CHAPTER XII

“WHEN ALL THE WORLD IS YOUNG, LAD!”

I

LOUIS HAMMOND returned to the camp that morning after he had parted with Josephine Stone down on the beach near Amethyst Island in a seventh heaven of ecstatic speculation. It was his first genuine love affair. The thrill of having held the svelt, firm form of that lovely creature yielding in the embrace of his arms was still upon him. He had discovered a new world—mating youth’s own wonder world, where the blue sky, the waving trees and the dancing water take on a new significance and seem to weave out of a sympathetic gladness the song of Eden’s first splendrous dawn. Ah, the magic and the poetry that come with the first sweep of Cupid’s wand in the early flush of manhood. . . . Youth that has yet to encounter it dreams not of the completeness of its power. . . . Middle life sighs for the dream that has vanished. . . . Age secretly revels in its memory as a miser gloats over his hoarded treasure. If, as the glum-faced realists tell us, it is all illusion—then, let Illusion reign!

“When all the world is young, lad,
And every field is green;
And every goose a swan, lad,
And every lass a queen,
Then hey for boot and horse, lad,
And round the world away;
Young blood must have its course, lad,
And every dog his day.”

Already young Hammond was looking forward to their next meeting—the very next morning, in fact, he planned to again saunter down to Amethyst Island on a chance of gaining a few hours of her exquisite society. She—she must be his own completely.

But always our profoundest dreams are ephemeral when grim Reality stalks in the background. Later, the natural law of moods brought to Hammond the inevitable reaction. He was smitten with a sense of duty unperformed. He could not exactly define it, but he had a feeling of uselessness, a vague notion that he was drifting nowhere. What indeed had a man, situated as he was at present, to offer a girl of Josephine Stone's evident refinement and high aspirations? So far as appearances were concerned he was nothing more than a vagrant biding his time on the pulp limits at the whim of a man who had dropped out of sight.

An inner voice demanded he should make a herculean effort to find his bearings at once. So far as he was concerned, things had drifted as long as he intended to allow them.

He must work out a plan of action—must find the answer to the conflicting incidents of the past few weeks and meanwhile secure real and useful employment. He had it! No doubt the officials in charge of the Kam City Company's pulp mill would instal him in the position Norman T. Gildersleeve had promised him that night on the train. First, he must find a means of getting to the city. It should not be a very difficult feat to steal aboard one of the outgoing tugs. Yet, if he did succeed in doing that very thing, what might be the possibilities of his getting back to see Josephine Stone? What if she should stand in need of his help and protection?

Hammond was on the horns of a dilemma, with the

problem ever recurring to him: What was Josephine Stone doing here, and what could there be in common between her and the pulp camp superintendent?

The road to a mental solution of these questions proved as baffling as an attempt to find the reason for the numerous weird experiences he had gone through since the night he had made the deal with Norman T. Gildersleeve. All those circumstances, he conceived, had been too remarkable to be the result of mere accident. Human ingenuity was somewhere at work with its own ends in view, and, back of it all, Hammond was convinced, a sinister drama was being woven into the texture of affairs with a design of bringing some terrific climax about. All these apparent things must be the by-play of hidden plot and counter-plot.

However, what was the use of trying to analyse situations that seemed to lead nowhere? Hammond wanted action—and, he was *going to have it*. . . . He would wait till to-morrow, see Josephine Stone in the morning and find out definitely if she felt quite sure of her own safety in this wild place. Then, if everything appealed to him as well, he would stow away on the tug for town in the afternoon. Once off the tug at Kam City he would be a free citizen and he could make a trip back to Amethyst Island at his pleasure in a motorboat.

But the way was made easier for Hammond to reach Kam City than he for the moment hoped, with subsequent events seemingly gauged for his further bewilderment.

II

Coming in from a stroll in the bush in the late afternoon, Hammond was considerably surprised to discover patrols of the Canadian Mounted Police pacing the waterfront. Being hungry, he went direct to the dining-camp,

expecting to learn from Sandy Macdougall, the cook, just what new crisis had arisen necessitating the presence of the police.

But he had finished the meal before the head cook came striding in. "Say, Hammond," he opened, "the Big Boss told me to tell you he wanted to see you at his office as soon as you came in. Must be something all-fired important, for he seemed to be fussy about it, which is odd for him."

Hammond hurried over. The interview was short. The superintendent handed him an envelope bearing his name in firm spencerian handwriting. "It contains a personal pass on any of the North Star tugs for the season," he announced. "You are at liberty now to use it at your pleasure."

The younger man concealed his amazement in a quiet "Thank you."

"Better take the first tug in the morning," suggested Acey Smith. "There's a possibility of the afternoon tugs being off the run."

"Oh, well, the following day will do as well," returned the elated Hammond. "My business in the city is not so pressing that a day's delay will matter."

The superintendent passed Hammond his cigarette case and lit a cigarette himself. "I'd take the early tug to-morrow if I were you," he insisted quietly. "There's no telling what may happen the tug service between here and the city after to-morrow."

"You're not thinking of laying up the boats?"

"No—*not* us." Smith studied Hammond idly, a curious, not unfriendly frown puckering his brows as he added: "Playing Sir Galahad seems to impair a journalist's nose for news, doesn't it, Hammond?"

That shot went home under the skin, but before Hammond could frame a rejoinder Acey Smith spoke up again.

"I was going to say," he remarked, "that should the tugs not be running when you are ready to return from the city that pass will be good on any make-shift service the company inaugurates to take the place of the big boats. Incidentally, I am leaving myself to-morrow on a trip to Montreal, and I'll not be returning to camp for several days or perhaps a week. For the meantime, I have instructed Mr. Mooney, the assistant superintendent, to take care of your wants while our guest."

Hammond was somewhat nettled by all this new show of attention and hospitality. He felt like telling the pulp camp superintendent to go to the devil, but he said "Thanks" again instead.

"Oh, just a minute, Hammond!"

Hammond paused at the door as Acey Smith strode over and passed him a newspaper. "The morning edition of the *Star*," he indicated. "There is an item on the front page that may interest you—considerably."

The wispy, mocking light that came over Acey Smith's face when he uttered that last word was lost on Hammond for the moment. He walked back to his quarters in a fighting mood, all the more poignant because he had had to suppress it. Smith seemed to take such a fiendish enjoyment out of making him feel like a child he was studying for the sheer fun of the thing. Too, Hammond's professional pride had been stung by the other's broad insinuation that he, for a newspaper man, was woefully asleep to what was going on around him. It had gone the deeper because it was coupled with that vague hint about his attentions to Josephine Stone—at least that was what Hammond had taken the reference to Sir Galahad to mean.

What *was* going on at the limits? Why were all these mounted police out here? Why did the workmen, muttering in groups, fall so silent when he came near? Un-

doubtedly, a crisis of some sort was near at hand and he *had* missed a big piece of news that was breaking right under his nose. He began to concede to himself that he was deserving of the keenest of Acey Smith's sarcasm. He had needed something like that to bring him down out of the clouds.

At first he was for going down and striking up a conversation with some of the police. On second thought he didn't—he knew from experience how absolutely close-mouthed Canadian mounted policemen were about their orders. There was little that Sandy Macdougall would not know; he'd ask Sandy first.

But Sandy hadn't come over from the cook camp when Hammond entered their shack. He had built up the fire in the little heater and lit his pipe when he bethought him of the *Star* that Acey Smith had passed him.

Under the wall lamp Hammond spread out the paper, then he jumped to his feet as his eyes were caught by a lower corner scare-line heading:—

**POLICE LOOKING FOR YOUNG STRANGER
SEEN WITH N. T. GILDERSLEEVE BEFORE
MILLIONAIRE DISAPPEARED FROM TRAIN**

**Unknown Youth Travelling Alone Was in Pulp Mag-
nate's Stateroom, Coloured Porter Tells Authorities—
Suspicion of Foul Play?**

Mysterious Note Delivered En Route

In the body of the article Hammond read a badly-garbled description of himself and an equally highly-elaborated story of his interview with Gildersleeve. The coloured porter's powers of imagination were in excellent working order, for he told of a loud altercation going on inside the stateroom before he entered, and that both

men were standing glaring at each other with drawn, white faces when he was admitted.

It was all very ridiculous to one on the inside as to what really had happened, but quite on a par with most of the wild raft of useless clues brought to the surface by the police dragnet in mystery cases. Hammond might have laughed outright but for another thought that occurred to him.

He was under suspicion of having something to do with Gildersleeve's disappearance!

So this was why Acey Smith had so suddenly become liberal with a pass over on the tug! The minute Hammond touched foot on Kam City docks he was very liable to be arrested and thrown into jail on suspicion of being concerned in a plot to do away with Gildersleeve. He would afterwards have to go through one of those small town police "third degrees," usually more brutal and stupid than they were effective.

Smith had known that before he made out the pass—then he had given him the paper with this news in it so that he'd see how dangerous it would be for him to attempt to visit Kam City just now.

It was a proof of the superintendent's fiendish notion of what constituted a good' joke—but no, that couldn't be it. Smith had been too insistent on Hammond's taking the early tug. Acey Smith was too keen a reader of character to doubt that he, Hammond, would face the music rather than skulk around the pulp camp a fugitive from justice. Smith had some other motive, thought Hammond—there was no doubt about that now. Despite his obvious iniquity, there was a strong element of Canadian sportsmanship in Acey Smith's make-up, Hammond had seen proofs of that. More likely he took this off-hand method of warning Hammond what he'd be up against when he landed in Kam City. That was more

like Acey Smith whom most men feared, others hated and few could find it in their hearts to exactly detest. . . . More, if the superintendent had merely wanted to complicate matters for Hammond he would only have had to send word to Kam City that he, Hammond, was over at the limits, and the authorities would come after him. Piecing it all together, the young man now sensed that for some deeper reason the Big Boss of the timber limits was anxious to see him go over to Kam City.

But, be that as it might be, Hammond's mind was fully made up. He was now more determined than ever to make the trip to Kam City on the morrow. He quite realised what an ugly position he might be placed in through the erratic evidence of the coloured porter, but he was chafing to have the whole thing over with. He could stand continued inaction no longer. If the police arrested him, well and good: he'd take a chance on the trend of events and his own evidence bringing the truth to the surface. True, his contract with Norman T. Gildersleeve called for his keeping secret the fact that he had been engaged by the millionaire to stay on the Nannabijou limits until he received other instructions, but Gildersleeve must truly have disappeared or he would take steps of some sort or other to prevent Hammond's arrest on a false charge. He could find no conscientious reason why he should hold out longer.

He glanced at his watch. It was nearly ten o'clock. He decided not to wait up for Sandy Macdougall, for he would have to arise early to catch the morning tug. Tomorrow surely would be an eventful day.

III

Hammond was partially awakened by the cook prowling around with his bottle and a metal cup. Hammond

declined Sandy's invitation to join him in a "night-cap" and turned over to go to sleep again.

"Heard the big news, Hammond?" the cook asked.

Hammond rolled over again under the blankets at that. "No, Sandy," he replied. "What's being pulled off on the limits anyway?"

Macdougall tossed down his "three fingers" and gazed meaningly at the rusty stove-pipe. "There's going to be something drop around this layout before many days are over," he said finally.

"Yes?" encouraged Hammond.

"You'll keep anything I tell you under your hat?"

"Sure, if you say so."

"Strike and blue hell to pay," informed the cook solemnly. "Whole caboodle will throw down tools—tugmen, waterfront men, pole-cutters and all."

"H'm, so that's it—that's why the mounted police are over here," reflected Hammond. "What's the grievance?"

"More pay and shorter hours. Ain't that what they always say?"

"But I thought the North Star Company were always ready to consider the demands of the men?"

"Maybe they will this time," replied Macdougall, "but I got a hunch they won't. There's something phony about this whole business. They've let a whole flock of bolsheviks and O.B.U. agitators into the camps and never even tried to stop them 'holdin' meetings, and the foremen have been bullin' the men the past few days just as if they wanted to egg them on. Besides I mistrust that faraway glint in Acey Smith's wicked eyes these days. Whenever you see the Big Boss goin' around like as if he was in a trance and he looks at you with that queer little devil-grin playin' at the corners of his mouth there's new hellery on foot, you can bank on that."

"Then you think the North Star's out to break the strike?"

"I don't know," Macdougall was rapidly divesting himself of mackinaw and shoepacks, "but I've a hunch Acey Smith has the dope from the higher-ups and that it ain't for a settlement."

Having so pronounced himself, the cook blew out the light and plunged into his bunk.

IV

Hammond awoke to find the little shack flooded with daylight. That meant that it was late—much too late to catch the morning tug. He had neglected to tell Sandy Macdougall to call him, and he was not by nature an early riser.

Nevertheless, if he acknowledged the truth to himself, he was not as disappointed about it as he should have been under the circumstances. There would surely be another tug in to-day, he reflected—and the delay would give him an opportunity to slip over to Amethyst Island before he left.

After breakfast, he set out along the lakeshore trail in high spirits. At the bridge over the Nannabijou River he was brought up short by a mountie. "Let me see your pass," requested the young man in uniform.

Hammond had to acknowledge that he hadn't any, that he hadn't known one was necessary.

"Sorry then," politely informed the policeman, "but the waterfront beyond here is out of bounds for any one not holding a pass signed by Inspector Little and the camp superintendent. That's orders."

Considerably abashed, Hammond struck back for the camp. He would try Acey Smith for a waterfront pass. Likely, in view of the superintendent's previous anxiety

to have him leave on the early boat, he would be refused point-blank, but it was worth finding out.

He turned at a shrill tooting out beyond the field of boomed pulpwood. A tug was just coming in the gap. They must be running wild to-day—and perhaps this would be the last one in before the strike was called. He had better take it over to Kam City, he reflected.

The tug had docked when Hammond reached the camp's "main street," and he noted that along with a number of questionable-looking men in city garb the dark-eyed girl in the sable furs, known as Yvonne, descended the gang-plank. Acey Smith was not in his office nor anywhere about the docks.

Two members of the mounted force examined the passes of the passengers as they came off the dock. The men dispersed into the upper reaches of the camp, while the girl paused to talk to a tall, black-whiskered man in an over-long rusty black coat who went down to meet her.

Hammond was sure he saw first impatience then anger come into Yvonne's dark face as the Rev. Nathan Stubbs conversed with her in guarded undertones. Suddenly she swept away from him with a stamp of her little foot and went direct to the office of Acey Smith, where she entered without rapping.

The tug took off little freight and took on less. Its whistle gave a sharp warning blast.

Hammond raced down to the dock. The deck-hands were actually pulling up the gang-plank and unsnubbing the hawsers.

He held out his pass for the mounties to see as he went by, conscious that some one was racing at his heels. A strong hand reached out and clutched at his shoulder, and he flung it off unceremoniously. The gang-plank was up, but he cleared the space between the edge of the dock and the tug's low deck in a flying leap.

He turned to see the Rev. Nathan Stubbs being unceremoniously yanked back off the dock by policemen as he continued to gesticulate in a wild, appealing fashion at Hammond.

CHAPTER XIII

"THEM WAS ROARING DAYS!"

I

AS the tug swung out with a great churning astern, Hammond caught the eye of the skipper looking out of the wheel-house above. Chuckling over the antics of the chagrined camp preacher, he jerked his head for Hammond to come up.

"Take a seat." The genial-faced captain motioned Hammond to the cushioned bench at the back of the tiny wheel-house. "The sky-pilot seemed to be all fussed up about something, didn't he?"

"Yes," replied Hammond. "I'm at a loss to know what came over him all of a sudden. As a rule he never appeared to notice I existed around the camp."

"Oh, I guess he's harmless, from what I hear," agreed the captain, "but you can never tell just what's what about some of these queer birds they let hang around that camp. There's that old Medicine Man, for instance, I wouldn't trust my back to him two minutes in the bush."

"Ogima Bush? You think he's dangerous?"

The skipper yanked at the lever of the steam steering-gear and swung the tug due west outside the channel through the pulp booms. "There ain't any bully in the camp will take chances on crossing him," he said significantly.

"You'd think the superintendent would have him run off the limits."

"He daren't, even if he wanted to," declared the captain. "It's long odds that old crock is cahoots with the Big Boss. At least everybody's got that notion."

"Speak of the devil," he exclaimed next minute, "there's the Big Boss heading for camp now."

Hammond leaped to his feet and looked where the captain was pointing. Sure enough he could discern the superintendent's red racing motorboat tearing over the water from a point the other side of Amethyst Island, bow up in air with a crash of foam under its midships.

"Try the glasses," suggested the captain. Hammond fitted them to his eyes and adjusted the lenses. Acey Smith, at the wheel, was the only occupant of the tiny cockpit.

"Smith talked of going over to Kam City this afternoon," suggested Hammond.

"Yes, he told me yesterday he was in a hurry to get things cleaned up so he could get away in time," replied the other. "He intended to catch the night train for Montreal."

"Suppose you know there's trouble on among the tugmen?" he queried turning from the steering-lever a moment.

"Strike?"

"Yes, and if the tugmen go out it means the pole-cutters and the white boom-tenders at the limits will down tools in sympathy tying everything up as tight as a river-jam."

"Likely Smith's going to Montreal to talk it over with some of the heads of the company, eh?" Hammond was sparring for more information.

"I dunno." There came a faraway look in the captain's blue eyes. "Hon. J. J. Slack, of Kam City, is supposed to be top dog of this outfit, and then again some think he's only a straw boss. But if you asked a lot of

people they'd tell you the real head push of this outfit hangs out in a place that's a lot hotter than Montreal or Kam City."

Hammond was scarcely paying any attention to the captain's words. He had the glasses trained on Amethyst Island which they were now passing. The place had a deserted look. The doors of Josephine Stone's cottage were closed and there was not a sign of life on the island. That seemed queer—very queer. Perhaps, he conjectured, she had gone over to their meeting-place on the beach and was expecting him to happen along.

But he swept the beach with the glasses for a glimpse of her in vain. Presently, two scarlet-coated policemen emerged from the bush on the mainland and walked up the rise to a bell tent that was pitched on the crown of the hill. There one apparently flung an order to his companion, and the latter set off at a loping run in the direction of the pulp camp.

A depressing presentiment swept over Hammond. He would have liked to have asked the captain to turn in and let him off at Amethyst Island, but he didn't quite dare do that.

II

It was the captain who interrupted his reverie. "We were talking just now about that camp sky-pilot, the Rev. Nathan Stubbs," he reminded Hammond. "I was saying that Smith lets Ogima Bush the Medicine Man have the run of the camps because he can use him for his own purposes. Now it's different with that preacher fellow; it's always been known that the Big Boss won't order any kind of a Christian preacher out of camp so long as the preacher sticks to the gospel and his own particular line of trade."

"Is that a fact?" This to Hammond was an entirely

new side light on the character of the pulp camp superintendent.

"True as your standing there," emphasised the skipper. "Why, all of us boat captains have standing orders that any of them chaps with their collars buttoned behind is to travel free back and forth to the camps whether they have a pass or not. It's the same in the camp; they ain't charged anything for grub and bunk and everybody has orders to use them polite and decent. At the same time, the Big Boss lets the preachers see they're to steer wide of him. He has a way of doing that, you know, and the wise ones know enough not to try any of their holy groaning on a hard-boiled egg like him.

"There's been every known kind of soul-saving genius knocking around our camps in my time; Catholic priests, highfaluting English churchers, Methodist missionaries, Salvation Army drum-beaters and the like," continued the captain. "But I only know of one preacher who tried mixing it with Acey Smith. He was a bush-camp evangelist they called Holy Henry that used to rant to the lumber-jacks and lead them in psalm-singing all the way from the Soo up to the Rainy and the Lake of the Woods. Holy Henry was a wizened up bit of a man with big, thick glasses and mild-looking blue eyes back of them. But, Lord, man, hadn't he a temper when he got blazing away at the devil and all his works! He'd chew up half a dozen dictionaries getting high-brow words to lambast sin and back-sliding, and he'd mix 'em up with camp slang in a way that would get the boys whether they wanted to listen to him or not. He'd 've been a popular guy, that preacher, if he hadn't been so death on all the little games of chance the lumber-jack has a weakness for. That kind of gave him a black eye all over the North.

"We were taking out timber in the Dog Bay country

when Holy Henry paid us his visit. The North Star camps were wide open in them days; nothing was barred but wild women and promiscuous booze-running. There was every known manner of winning or losing a wad from big wheels-of-fortune, chuck-a-luck, paddle-wheels and stud poker down to nigger craps. Nobody ever interfered so long as the men were on their jobs on time and there was no knife-sticking or gun-play. Why, the whole bunch used to gulp dinner like a lot of brush-wolves just so they'd have the biggest part of their noon-hour trying their chances for easy money. Some of the lucky ones cleaned up a pile of money and some that weren't got cleaned out even to their whole season's wages and their packsacks. Them was roaring days!

"When this here Holy Henry hits the camps everybody got to speculating just what end of the horn he'd come out at, and of course there were some long stakes put up right on that there question, but all the big odds was on Holy Henry breaking down on the job for quits inside of two weeks. I was in charge of a river gang in them days, and I remember having a nifty side-bet that he'd get so sick of trying to break up things he'd just slip away faking a bad cold or something of that sort.

"But what happened wasn't what any of us had figured on. The first thing that fool preacher did was to go to the super's. office and appeal to him to put the lid on. Acey Smith looks down at the little fellow with the thick glasses and the weak eyes with that sort of good-natured curiosity you see on a big St. Bernard dog when a poodle gets in his way. 'This ain't any Sunday school we're running out here, Holy Henry,' he says, 'and saving souls isn't exactly in my line; but if you can throw a scare of hell-fire into this outfit of blacklegs so that they'll thumb hymn-books instead of poker decks, go to it. That's your particular business and I won't put any sticks in your

way.' Then he turns away with that little demon-grin of his and goes back to his work.

"Some of us that had big bets on the preacher quitting early thought to hurry him up by getting him peeved. So when he came out all sort of wilted-like we says to him to get his goat: 'What you going to do about it now, Holy Henry?'

"'I am going to pray for Brother Smith,' he surprises us by replying. 'I know he's going to be on the side of the Lord.'

"That made us roar so that half of the camp heard us. 'Brother Smith,' mind you, he called him. We never quite got over that, but none dared to twit the super. about it. He's mighty touchy on some things, is Acey Smith.

"All went along pretty much as per usual till Sunday came. Sunday was the red-letter gambling day at the North Star camps because the boys had full time at it with no other worries. Some of 'em used to piece the bull cooks to bring their meals to them so they wouldn't miss a deal.

"Holy Henry had announced a morning service in a shack that had been turned over to him for that purpose, but not a man-jack turned up to it but an old Injun half-wit who'd been roped in by the Salvation Army and a one-eyed Hunkie who'd got religion at one of the week-day meetings. Holy Henry kneels down with his two-men congregation and prays silently for a few minutes. Then he went forth 'clothed in the wrath of the Lord' as he called it.

"And believe me, boy, *that* was some wrath. Somewhere outside he gathered up a piece of a broken hand-spike, and brandishing it around his head, he lands into first one camp shack and then another. He couldn't make any mistake picking them random that way; they

were all going full tilt. He'd burst through a door and land in like a little package of greased hurricane. Out would go his foot and over would go a table, chips, cards, money and all. Then he'd swing his club within an inch of the faces of the crowd. 'Out of here, you bleary-eyed, low-lived, pigeon-toed, white-livered disciples of Baal!' he'd yell. 'Out, you sin-corroded, knock-kneed, flannel-mouthed desecrators of the Lord's Day! Out, I say, for the wrath of God Almighty is upon you!'

"Say, you'd be surprised to see how quick he cleaned up the whole works. In about two minutes he'd smashed up about a thousand dollars' worth of slot-machines and fortune-wheels with that hand-spike club of his. The crowd at first just stood around sort of paralysed and didn't lift a finger to stop him. There was low growls, lots of curses, and threats of ganging him, but being that he was a preacher nobody seemed ready to start things.

"Some of the lads with level heads decided to go down and get the super. to interfere and decide what was to be done with the wild-eyed preacher. Smith was reading one of them high-brow books in his office when the delegation bursts in. He didn't say a word, just got up, slips on his mackinaw and goes out to locate the cause of the disturbance.

"Holy Henry was smashing things about in the sixth shack on his list when the Big Boss poked his head in the door with the gang crowding up at his rear.

"'What in hell does this mean?' the super. raps out, spearing the preacher with them wicked, snapping black eyes of his. His face was like chalk from the cold anger he was holding back.

"Holy Henry was in the act of dumping a lot of poker chips and cards into the stove. The sweat was running down his face in little creeks and his thick glasses had

got all steamed up, which didn't matter because he was seeing all red up to that time. But the Big Boss's words hit him like cold chunks of ice that had been shot into his system and the pep seemed to go out of him all at once. I'd seen bigger and stronger men than Holy Henry break down like that in front of Acey Smith, and I almost began to feel sorry for this trembling little bit of whiff of a fellow with that black devil of a man towering over him.

"'It's the Lord's Day,' he stammers. 'I was just cleaning up these—these hell parlours.'

"'Hell parlours—hell parlours,' echoes the super. 'Who in blue blazes gave you a license to wreck the camp? Tell me that!'

"The little fellow looked more sorrowful than ever and he says sort of quietlike: 'I thought you were on our side, Brother Smith; I was doing this in the name of the Lord, Jesus Christ.'

"If you ever saw a change come over the face of a man it was that that came over the super's. He drew back like as if something had hit him, and the palms of his hands went up to his face as though he was choking. Maybe you've seen him do that sometimes? It's like as if a devil inside him was trying to jump out and was strangling him.

"But next minute he walks over to the preacher and takes him by the arm. 'Finish your job, Holy Henry,' he says, 'and if any one so much as lifts a finger at you, well—'

"He didn't finish, but turns and glowers at the gawping crowd like a lion. 'Men,' he orders, 'the lid's down tight on Sunday gambling in these camps. You get that straight!'

"He said it, and that meant it was law. And it's been law in the North Star camps ever since.

"What becaime of Holy Henry? Now, I don't know. Anyway, he was only a few days in the camp after that incident. At one of his meetings he made some fool remark about the Big Boss seeing a great light suddenly like the Bible says St. Paul did. That settled him for keeps.

"The next morning Acey Smith meets the preacher and stops him. 'Holy Henry,' he says, 'you've shot your bolt—you're through here.'

"'But, Brother Smith,' expostulates the little fellow, 'I've just barely started my work in the Lord's vineyard.'

"'You beat it out on the next tug to some other vineyard—and don't come back!' cuts in the Big Boss, cold as ice. 'And listen: I'm not brother to you nor to any other man. Furthermore, I ain't any St. Paul seeing lights; I'm just a fighting he-man who doesn't pray to God nor the Devil either. All I ask both of them to do is to give me a sporting chance to make good at my job.

"'You've got me wrong about stopping that Sunday gambling stunt,' he continues. 'I did that partly because I can't help being on the side of the man who's got the guts to back up his convictions when the whole crowd is against him. But I put the lid down mostly because it struck me it would be good policy for the North Star to make its men take a rest on Sunday. You go and pack your turkey—the next tug leaves at noon.' "

The skipper paused when he had concluded his story. After a silent moment he turned to Hammond. "Now what do you think of that for a hard-hearted speech?" he asked.

"Just sounds like Acey Smith," responded Hammond, "and I take it that what he told Holy Henry was just about the truth about himself."

"Probably—probably," reiterated the captain in an ab-

sent sort of a way as he fixed his gaze on the city wharves they were nearing. "But at the same time, I dunno. There's a strange streak in that same Acey Smith. There's things he's done and does, on the quiet, that makes us older heads with the company admire him in spite of ourselves. But you can never get to know the Big Boss, no matter how long you're around where he is. Just when you think you know him is the time he's liable to do or say something so sudden and unexpected it will make your blood run cold. It strikes me while he's talking to you with his tongue his mind is always busy thinking and plotting something else—thinking up plans maybe a year ahead."

"This coming strike will likely give him lots of scope for thinking," observed Hammond dryly.

"Oh, he won't have so much to do with settling or breaking the strike," declared the captain. "Them orders will come to Slack and him from their higher-ups."

The skipper pressed a signal to the engine-room to slow down. They were swinging in to the city wharf.

III

Hammond alighted on the docks of Kam City and walked the streets expecting at any moment a blue-coated policeman or a plain-clothes detective would step forward and take him into custody in connection with the Gildersleeve disappearance. But no such thing happened. The very boldness of his entry must have set the sleuths of the law off guard, for at no time did he even find himself under suspicious scrutiny.

One thing at first absorbed his thoughts to the exclusion of everything else. That was the uncertainty of what might have happened to Josephine Stone. Where could she have gone from the island? The appearance

of Acey Smith in the vicinity of the island alone in his motorboat made him the more uneasy. It all brought home to him a dark thought that he had all along been trying to fight off—that Josephine Stone some way or another must be entangled in the baffling mystery of the Nannabijou Limits. But, in spite of constantly rising perplexities, he refused to think of her in bitterness or that she had in any sense been consciously deceiving him. He would not believe that a woman such as she would give her lips to a man, as she had to him, either in spirit of coquetry or to further dark intrigue.

It was possible she had merely gone away in her motorboat for a trip along the lakeshore, or she might have come over to the city for the day. But there had been a deserted look about her cottage on the island that weighed in upon Hammond—made him feel that something else had happened. Anyway, he must hustle with the affairs he had come to the city to attend to, so that he could get back to the limits and find out for certain where she had gone.

Gold lettering on a window in the second storey of a business block across the street reminded him that he had mapped out a definite program for the day and that right here was where he must make his start. The sign marked the quarters of the American consul. There he would find the little grey man, Eulas Daly, the first on his mental list of interviews. He crossed the street and sought out the consul's office.

A tall, slim, alert-looking young man rose from his desk and genially inquired of what service he could be.

Hammond passed him his card. "Might I see Mr. Daly?"

"Mr. Daly?" repeated the other with a puzzled air.

"Yes—Mr. Eulas Daly, American consul."

"A mere error in names, Mr. Hammond. I am the

American consul in charge here, but my name is Frank W. Freeman."

"Oh, I see," surmised Hammond. "There has been a change—Mr. Daly has been recently transferred to another post?"

"Quite a year ago, my friend," replied Mr. Freeman definitely. "Mr. Daly was transferred to the Buenos Aires office in October of last year and I have been in charge here since then. Perhaps there's something I could do for you?"

"At that rate, no. Thank you," acknowledged Hammond concealing as best he could his amazement and chagrin. "It was a personal matter between myself and Mr. Daly. I have been misinformed as to his location."

Hoaxed!

Inured as Hammond was becoming to trickery and mystification, this latest revelation brought about a poignant disappointment. It seemed the more he probed the incidents following his contract with Norman T. Gildersleeve to go to the Nannabijou Limits the more complicated things became. Every attempt he had made to get at the bottom of things had resulted in fresh bewilderment until everything appeared like a bedevilled dream. But it was no dream. Cold conviction was upon him that it was quite the contrary—that it was a series of baffling incidents promoted for a dark purpose by a sinister agency behind the scenes somewhere.

According to this latest piece of information, the man giving his name as Eulas Daly, United States consul at Kam City, and who had brought about his meeting with Norman T. Gildersleeve, was travelling under false colours. If he were really a friend of Norman T. Gildersleeve there should have been no necessity for that. The obvious conclusion then was that he was a confederate of those who had lured Gildersleeve off the train. No

doubt it was he who framed up the mysterious message that led the millionaire to leave the coach at Moose Horn Station, for Hammond now felt certain that the note delivered while he was in consultation with the president of the International Investment Corporation was a forgery, and that Gildersleeve had either been kidnapped or had met with foul play.

Responsibility to the man who had employed him for some secret purpose that was not yet obvious demanded immediate action on his part. It would be foolhardy, he conceded, to longer attempt to fathom the mystery alone or to conceal what he knew in connection with the affair. Before he reported to the police authorities, he felt it would be wisdom to consult the principals of the Kam City Pulp and Paper Mills, who, if anybody, should be closest in touch with any new developments in the Gildersleeve mystery.

He dropped into a hotel whence he telephoned the city offices of the paper company. He was told that Artemus Duff, president and general manager, was out at the works and might not be back all afternoon. Hammond decided to go out to the works, and, as they were located at the extreme easterly limits of the city, he walked down to Front Street, which ran along the harbour, to catch a street car. He was standing at a car stop when the face of a man at the wheel of a motor car that whizzed by seemed to him to be startlingly familiar.

The motor car stopped a block up at the corner above the short street leading from the city docks. A man got out, paused a second on the walk looking down the street, then disappeared into the building on the corner.

Hammond's first breathless impression was confirmed. The little grey man who got out of the car was the man who had introduced himself on the train as Eulas Daly, American consul.

The young man lost no time in reaching the spot. The man who had got out of the car was not in the drug store on the corner, so he must have passed in the double doors just next it and gone up the stairs. Hammond took the steps three at a bound. The first floor up was entirely occupied by law offices. On the double glass doors he read the gilt-lettered legend:—

WINCH, STANTON & REID
Barristers, Solicitors,
Etc.

He decided to make a try for his man in there. At the rail just beyond the doors he was met by a young woman.

"It is very important that I meet the gentleman who just came in," he announced to her.

"Mr. Winch?"

"Yes—Mr. Winch."

She took his card, passed into one of the glass-partitioned private offices and returned after what to Hammond seemed an unjustifiable delay. "Mr. Winch will see you in ten minutes," she said. "Just take a seat, please."

Hammond was forced to cool his heels till the girl, after responding to an office 'phone call, indicated that Mr. Winch was ready to receive him.

Hammond at last had struck the right trail. The little grey man gazing up at him from across the desk in the private office was none other than the bogus Eulas Daly. But Winch did not look the least flustered; in fact, there was the barest trace of the geniality he had worn in the rôle of the American consul.

"Mr. Hammond," he opened quietly, "I have a shrewd notion what questions you have in mind to demand of me. But, before we proceed with that, will you kindly tell me why you have violated your contract with Mr.

Gildersleeve by leaving the Nannabijou Limits without notification?"

"Because I'm tired up with the whole business," exploded the young man. "Because I'm not quite ass enough to stick out there on an assignment from a man who's dropped out of sight. And, in the next instance, I want to know from you why you—"

"Just a moment, just a moment," insisted Mr. Winch. "We'll come to that presently. Did you know that your leaving the limits at this particular time may seriously jeopardise the plans Mr. Gildersleeve had in mind?"

"Mr. Gildersleeve has disappeared."

"Even so. That, however, does not prevent his associates carrying on, does it? As I understood it, you agreed with Mr. Gildersleeve to remain at the limits in the capacity he sent you until you received word to return, and he emphasised the injunction that you were to remain no matter what apparently unusual things happened. Is that not a fact, Mr. Hammond?"

It was a fact—Hammond felt the full force of it now. For the moment he was not prepared with a reply. He was in grips with one of the most brilliant cross-examiners in the north country.

"But we will let that pass for the moment," the lawyer proceeded. "You haven't consulted any one else in the city about this matter?"

"No, but I was on my way to look up President Duff of Kam City Pulp and Paper Mills when I dropped in here."

"You acted very wisely in coming here first," commended Mr. Winch. "I would urge you not to consult Mr. Duff or any others about it, and, I might add, it is of as deep concern to you as it is to us that Mr. Gildersleeve's intimate affairs in this matter should not become public under any consideration."

"But you haven't told me why, when you accosted me on the train, you found it necessary to impersonate an American consul who has long since left the city," insisted the impetuous Hammond.

A wry smile broke faintly over the lawyer's face. "Gildersleeve was to blame for that," he replied. "He insisted, for some reason that was never quite clear to me, that I should not disclose my real identity to you. It may have been that, in case you did not feel inclined to consider the suggestion to meet him, he did not wish you to know his legal advisor was acting as go-between. The use of Eulas Daly's name was almost accidental. An old card of his must have by some chance got into my case. It appealed to me that for the interim the rôle of Eulas Daly would do as well as any other. I did not expect to see you again until this business was over with."

This explanation did not impress Hammond favourably, but it was evident, from the matter-of-fact manner in which he related the deception, that Winch cared little how he took it.

So Hammond feigned as great an indifference as he asked: "Then you really did the preliminary work at Mr. Gildersleeve's instance?"

Winch plainly did not relish being kept in the position of the cross-examined. "Yes," he replied with a shrug. "Gildersleeve had selected you as a likely man for the job during the day while you were sitting talking to a companion next table to him in the dining car. He asked me to feel you out about it, and, at the moment you dropped into the smoker that evening, I was just about to set out in search for you."

"One more question, Mr. Winch," pursued Hammond. "You spoke a few moments ago about his associates

'carrying on' while Mr. Gildersleeve is absent. Am I to take it from that he *is* still alive?"

"We are certain of nothing," answered the other, "but we have hopes for the best. It is not a point over which you need waste worry; the plans for his enterprises will be carried on as before."

"Then there is nothing I could do that would assist in clearing up the mystery of Mr. Gildersleeve's disappearance?" insisted Hammond.

"No—not a thing. Your plan is to return to the Nannabijou Limits this afternoon as quietly as possible," suggested the legal man. "There you had best resume your former rôle until such time as you are communicated with."

"That sounds very well," impatiently commented Hammond, "but, in the event of Mr. Gildersleeve having disappeared permanently, I might remain there for a very long time without any particular purpose being served."

"In such a case I will personally take the responsibility of instructing you when to return," assured Winch. "Furthermore, I will take it upon myself to guarantee that you are paid for your services according to the verbal contract between yourself and Mr. Gildersleeve."

Hammond hesitated a moment. He was thinking about Josephine Stone and the possibilities of being near her again; otherwise he would not have entertained any proposal to return to the limits under the circumstances.

Before he could reply, however, there came sounds of a loud commotion from somewhere on the streets outside; jeers, the shrill cries of young boys and the rush of many feet.

IV

Winch rose from his desk and hurried to the window. As he looked out his face went grey with alarm and his lips moved in a single gasp:—

"Hell!"

Hammond was at his side in a trice. The window overlooked the short street leading up from the city dock, where, in a surging crowd of men and street urchins, two red-coated policemen of the Canadian mounted force were escorting up the street a tall, black-whiskered man in dark baggy clothes.

"Some one has made a tremendous blunder!"

Winch thus spoke his thoughts with a solemnity that betrayed his inward agitation. At that instant the man between the two mounties looked up toward Winch's window and gave utterance to a loud fierce yell.

Hammond gave a gasp of surprise.

The prisoner was the Rev. Nathan Stubbs, camp preacher at Nannabijou Limits.

CHAPTER XIV

"A BEAUTIFUL, PALE DEVIL"

I

ON the day that Louis Hammond left the Nannabijou Limits for Kam City, Acey Smith and one other were astir long before the young newspaper man had opened an eye in his comfortable bunk. Acey Smith, as was his usual custom, shaved before the large mirror opposite the eastern window of his bedroom, his thoughts busy with a problem that had been agitating him since his visit to Amethyst Island the day before.

It was while completing the last few deft touches to his toilet that the Big Boss of the Nannabijou Limits caught momentarily a reflection in the glass of a face and figure moving past the window back of him.

As if the fleeting reflection in the glass had brought him an inspiration, he paused in wiping the talc powder from his chin. Then he smote the little table below with a clenched fist such a blow that the articles thereon went tottering.

He whirled and turned his attention to a packsack into which he hastily stowed a number of wrapped packages, strapped the flap of the pack and slipped his arms through the shoulder pieces. He took a swift survey of surroundings from the windows, then stepping outside sauntered down to the bell tent on the water-front occupied by Inspector Little of the Mounted Police.

He was with the inspector perhaps twenty minutes, when he accompanied the latter to the dining camp.

They had breakfast and returned to the dock, whence the superintendent soon shot out in his red racing boat which tore its way out of sight on the rolling expanse of Superior.

II

The tug bearing Hammond to Kam City was well out on the lake when Acey Smith returned. He tied the red racer up in its berth on the limits docks and immediately made his way to his office. The enthusiasm that had sat upon his face when he had departed earlier in the day was gone. In its place was a tired, worried look.

As he entered the office, a handsome, dark-eyed young woman seated by a window dropped a book to her lap and looked up.

"Waiting long, Yvonne?"

The inquiry was casual but kindly. He whipped open a drawer of his desk, filled a silver cigarette case from a large tin box. Then he fitted a cigarette in an amber holder and lighted it.

"Just since the tug came in." There was a suggestion of pique in the girl's tones that went unnoticed. Her gaze followed his every movement with fascinated intensity. But when he looked her way her eyes fell quickly.

Followed a long pause. Acey Smith stood looking out a window, half turned to her, the while he drew hungrily at the cigarette, his eyes in an abstracted stare.

"Has something happened? Is—is anything wrong?"

He turned at the deep anxiety in Yvonne's tones. "No, nothing wrong, Yvonne—I'm just a bit spent. It's been a trying morning."

He tossed the cigarette stub into the stove and drawing a long, sealed manilla envelope from a pocket handed it to her. "Yvonne," he said, "I want you to go over to

Kam City with me in the racer this afternoon. When we land you are to go to J. J. Slack's office and deliver this letter from J.C.X. to him. If he asks any questions, tell him the wireless broke down and it was impossible to get in touch with him."

"Aren't you going to see Mr. Slack yourself?"

"Likely, but say nothing to him about it. I am leaving for Montreal to-night."

"For Montreal?" She bit her nether lip in the nervous effort it cost her to follow up: "*Alone?*"

"Yes, alone. Why do you ask, Yvonne?"

She toyed with the letter he had handed her, her eyes averted. "Alexander,"—she pronounced the name softly and with a great diffidence—"who is the girl living on Amethyst Island?"

Acey Smith smiled good-naturedly. "Miss Stone, you mean? She'll be leaving here shortly."

"For where?"

He shrugged. "That—depends on circumstances."

"Did you know her before she came out here?"

"Never saw her before. But why all this catechism, Yvonne?"

Yvonne Kovenay arose. She threw out her hands in an odd gesture. "I want to ask you, Alexander, do you think I work for you as I do for the money you pay me alone?"

His face became suddenly serious. "Why no, Yvonne, such service as yours could not be bought with a monthly cheque. Love of one's work alone could inspire it."

The girl winced as if she had been struck. "Love of my work?" she cried. "Great God, did you think it was love of my work?"

III

Acey Smith receded a step as she came forward, a magnificent little creature under stress of her emotions; her bosom heaving, her long lashes dank and her great dark eyes brilliant with the tears that forced themselves.

"Alexander, it has all been for—for *love of you!*"

She flung herself upon him, her soft arms about his neck, her dusky head with its masses of ebony hair upon his breast.

"Yes, yes," she cried in sobbing abandon, "a thousand times yes—for you, my Alexander, king of all men, the strongest of the strong!" The tiger soul of her cried out for its chosen mate: "All other men are dwarfs beside you; you crush them with your very smile. Who is there among them all can stand before your might? How could woman help loving you as I do?"

"Oh, I have tried hard not to do this! I tried to be patient in the hope that some day you would—would understand. Then, then, she came—that girl on Amethyst Island with her mincing ways and her haughty airs—to ensnare you. I have been mad, mad, mad, at thought of your going to her. Then—then it came to me that I—I was only—your woman spy."

Gently, he endeavoured to release himself. "Not *my* woman spy," he corrected her. "Remember you came to me and I employed you on behalf of the North Star Company—for J.C.X."

"For the North Star—for J.C.X.!" She echoed it derisively. "What is the North Star to me? Do you think I would work as I have done; run risks of reputation, even life itself at times, for this J.C.X., a man I have never seen?"

"But haven't we treated you fairly?" he argued. "Isn't your salary next only to that of the president himself?"

Hasn't the North Star done everything within reason to reward you and show its appreciation of your services? What—what more is it you could ask, girl?"

"You—your love!"

She whispered it softly with a quick intaking of breath, her eyes opening momentarily in a quick, melting flash under his.

Acey Smith pushed her from him impatiently, almost roughly. His face became cold and hard, unutterably cruel for an instant. Then that wisp of a devil-sneer flickered on his handsome, ruthless features.

"My love!" And he laughed a laugh that was not pleasant to hear. "What foolishness put it into your head that I could love, Yvonne?"

His scornful tones bit the woman to the quick. Her dark eyes flashed dangerously. "It was her! It was her!" she flamed at him. "That baby-faced thing down on Amethyst Island. I thought until she came you were what you seemed to be—a beautiful, pale devil. And as a devil I worshipped you, silently and in secret, fondly believing I nor any other woman could claim you. I thought you were more than human—a being of destiny to whom all passions and weaknesses were scornful trivialities. Then—then she came—and I saw the change in you.

"Listen," she cried, her face chalk-white from the pent-up emotions surging within her. "Alexander, the thing which that thought awakens within me I tell you makes me mad—mad! You may never be mine, but you *never*, *never* shall be hers. *I will kill—*"

"Don't say that!"

There came a terrible look into the face of Acey Smith that sent her staggering back in deadly affright. Only by a supreme effort did the man appear to get a grip on himself.

But in another instant he was calm and smiling. "Poor, little Yvonne, my poor, little, faithful Yvonne," he soothed. "Child, you are just a bit over-strung; you have been working too hard lately. To-night you are going up to Winnipeg, to your father, on a month's vacation, and I am going to pick out a little present for you when we get over to the city—something by which in after days you may remember one who was not what he should have been, but who thought much of you. Let us forget this little incident for the present. We have work in hand to-day, you and I—big work—and you are going to Kam City with me now to deliver that letter, like a good little girl, aren't you?"

Like a child that has been chastised, then petted, she warmed under the light caress of his hand, the deep, musical persuasive qualities of his voice and the tremendous, irresistible magnetism of the man.

She looked up at him as of old, tried to meet those soul-searching black eyes with their wicked masterfulness, wavered and nodded acquiescence.

"I knew you would, Yvonne. This," he announced, "will be the beginning of the North Star's greatest coup—and its last."

"Its last?" She echoed it apprehensively.

He did not answer, but sprang to the window, a light of sinister amusement breaking over his face. "Look, Yvonne," he called. "Come and see what is happening to your preacher friend."

Down by the docks two mounted policemen were half leading, half dragging the handcuffed Rev. Nathan Stubbs into the police motorboat.

The girl gasped. "Why do you say my friend?" she asked, a quaver in her voice.

"He pretended to be your friend, and you told him what you should not have told him."

"Then you knew?" Her face was scarlet.

"I knew all. The North Star always knows."

"It was because—because I was crazy with jealousy," she pleaded. "It was on account of that Stone girl, and I thought he could tell me who she was and why you went to see her. I did not tell him all—not your great secret."

"My great secret?"

"Yes—that you are not Acey Smith in reality."

He laughed indulgently. "It would not matter now even if you had, Yvonne," he discounted, "because you nor any other could have told him who Acey Smith really is.

"Only one man knew that secret—and he is dead."

CHAPTER XV

THE FIAT OF J.C.X.

I

ARTEMUS DUFF, president and general manager of the Kam City Pulp and Paper Mills, paid his promised visit to the office of Hon. J. J. Slack, M.P., president of the North Star Towing and Contracting Company, about the same hour that Hammond went up to see Martin Winch, K.C.

The interview in most respects was inconsequential. As might be surmised, Slack's quest was for any chance bit of information regarding the rival paper company's plans that it might be to his advantage to know. His shrewd after-deductions were that Duff was not in the confidence of his own associates.

Duff, on the other hand, left the office of the wily politician no wiser than when he entered, but considerably reassured regarding the delivery of raw material to the mills from the Nannabijou Limits. Slack had a bland, big way of discussing a thing that put others off their guard.

"There are enough poles boomed in Nannabijou Bay to keep your mill running the better part of the coming year," he told Duff.

"So our inspectors report," agreed the other.

"The poles being there, we are bound to deliver them on time," reminded Slack.

"But the contract time for the opening of our mill is drawing near," complained the Kam City Company's

president, "and delivery hasn't even been started. Even the absence of Norman Gildersleeve wouldn't bother me so much if it were under way."

"There is little for you to lose sleep over on that point, Mr. Duff," Slack assured him. "Once our present dredging contracts are completed, which I expect will be in a few days' time, our full complement of tugs, carriers and loading scows will be on the job. Only an act of Providence could prevent the delivery of those poles on contract time."

"An act of Providence—only an act of Providence?" Duff repeated as he prepared to depart. Just what did Slack mean by dragging that reference in? However, he had uttered it quite casually, Duff remembered, and probably it had no special significance.

Slack *had* uttered it casually; but at that moment, even the president of the North Star Towing and Contracting Company had no idea of the real cards to be played.

Something of a revelation came to him that very afternoon.

II

Shortly after the departure of Artemus Duff, a dark, striking-looking young woman was ushered into Slack's private office. She closed the door cautiously behind her.

"Well, well, if it isn't Yvonne," greeted Slack. "I thought you were on business west of here."

"I was, J.J.," she replied as familiarly. "But I hurried back yesterday. I have just come over from the limits to deliver this special message to you."

She tossed a sealed official envelope on the desk.

Slack tore open the envelope, and, as he studied the contents, a worried frown gathered on his brow. "Won't you be seated a moment, Miss Kovenay?" he requested absently.

Slack worked with a pencil on a pad of paper deciphering the letter, which, as was usual with orders from the same source, was in the North Star's private code. It contained bald instructions, skeletonised of every spare word:—

Instruct North Star newspapers, east and west, drop conjectures re disappearance Gildersleeve. Print nil unless actually found dead or alive; then only barest details on inside pages, without display headings.

Put on double or triple shift, if necessary, on wireless ready any moment for emergency calls from limits station. File for wireless every day weather probabilities for east and west and full predictions Coster's Weather Bureau soon as same come in.

IMPORTANT. Make no promises re Tugmen's Union demand for increases and shorter hours, unless advised. Have papers print articles calculated to foment general seamen's strike on our own and other great lakes vessels. Hire more socialist agitators to help stir up discontent. Strike MUST materialise before day that dredging contracts are completed.

Sending A. C. Smith to Montreal, special business. If time, his instructions are to call on you before leaving to confer on matters above mentioned.

(Sgd.) J. C. X.

It literally took the breath out of Slack.

That second last paragraph regarding the tugmen's strike smote him like a club. The carrying out of these instructions, he felt, meant personal calamity for him—his political doom.

With cold sweat breaking at his temples he looked up to meet the questioning stare of Yvonne Kovenay's dark eyes.

"You know who this is from?" He asked it absently like one who scarcely expects a reply.

"Yes," she answered. Then leaning forward over the desk she said it in a whisper scarcely more than audible: "It is from J.C.X."

"Yvonne, tell me, have *you* ever met him?"

"No!" There was a suppressed shudder in the emphasis. "I hope I never do meet him. If I did—" Her voice trailed off to incoherency.

Hon. J. J. Slack shrugged his heavy shoulders. "Oh, I know what you think, Yvonne. I *know* what you think—it's what they all think." But Slack's indifferent shrug merely disguised the goose-flesh shiver that ran through his own frame.

"Was there anything else, Yvonne?"

"Yes—a personal favour." She pulled nervously at the fingers of her gloves. "Tell me, what is that girl doing out at Amethyst Island?"

"Good heavens, how should I know? Is there a girl stopping at Amethyst Island?"

"You didn't know she was there?"

"It's all news to me, Yvonne. Doesn't Acey Smith know?"

"She—she seems to be a friend of his." The woman's voice bore traces of deep agitation. "He spends a lot of time in her company."

Yvonne Kovenay had risen. She bade Slack a hurried good-day and whisked out of his office.

Slack, staring speculatively at the door through which she had vanished, muttered to himself: "So Acey Smith has a flame, and that Kovenay girl he employs as head of his intelligence bureau is wild with jealousy. H'm, there's real breakers ahead for Smith, or I miss my guess—and, if there's a nasty fuss at this particular time I can see where I get a crisp order from J.C.X. to forthwith dispense with the services of a certain crafty superintendent. I can see that."

But it was not possible pitfalls for Acey Smith which weighed heavily on the self-centred J. J. Slack—it was the nightmare of the coming strike of North Shore seamen that hung like a black cloud over him—the strike

that he would have to precipitate and take the blame for. Until now he had understood the company's stand-pat attitude was meant to be a temporary bluff only, and that the grievances of the men would be met before the strike actually came off. The orders he had just received dissipated all such fond illusions. His part in it would validate the total labour vote in his constituency. Good heavens, it meant ruin—complete ruin!

For a long period Slack paced the floor of his office. Futilely he tried to devise a way out. Five-thirty passed and the clerks in the outer office departed. Still he walked the floor. Yes—there was one way open. He would fight—bluff it through against this insane policy. Suddenly he came to a mental decision. He flung himself into his swivel chair and buried his face in his hands.

"I won't do it! I won't do it!" he spat out savagely. "I'll see J.C.X. in hell first!"

"Why—in *hell*?"

III

At the mocking tones Slack looked up and into a face whose black, commanding eyes rivetted his very soul; whose straight, firm-set mouth was drawn to a hair-line in its wisp of a smile.

"Acey Smith!"

The visitor ignored the startled salutation. "I'm not so sure," he ruminated, "that if you did meet J.C.X. in the regions you mentioned that you would not change your mind."

"But Smith, you are aware of the instructions forwarded to me to-day?"

"I have a pretty fair idea of the gist of those instructions."

"Don't you think J.C.X. could be prevailed upon to modify them?"

"Modify them? In what way?"

"With regard to precipitating a strike of the tugmen. Such a move would be folly—downright folly."

"I am certain no such modification could be obtained," declared Acey Smith. "You know quite as well as I that an order from J.C.X. is a command, and—well, you know what has happened to those that have failed in carrying on for the North Star."

"But the North Star has never had a strike in its history. It has been known for its fair and generous treatment of its men," argued Slack. "Its policy has always been to pay employes the highest wages and a bonus."

"Correct. But for this once J.C.X. has seen fit to change the policy of the North Star, with the North Star's own particular ends in view."

"It spells disaster."

"For whom?"

"For the North Star Company—for all of us. Why—"

"That's not the point that's worrying you, Mr. Slack!"

The challenge came swift and sharp like the crack of a whip. Though nominally his subordinate, there were crises in the history of the North Star Company when Slack had to mentally acknowledge a master in Acey Smith's presence. That was perhaps because he knew Smith in some way held the confidence of the directing mind of the firm, and—there was another reason that was not as tangible.

A wan remnant of what was meant to be a patient smile broke over the politician's fat face. "We'll be absolutely candid then," he agreed. "There's a Dominion election coming—the House may go to the country at any time. Smith, this proposed strike, with us refusing a settlement, would alienate every solitary labour vote in the North. Why, man, I couldn't run against a yellow dog and win; it would ruin my political future."

Acey Smith approached the other deliberately. He leaned forward until the tips of his inordinately long, tapering white fingers supported him on the edge of the desk.

"Slack," he pronounced with cold insolence, "*you have no political future.*"

"One moment!" He raised a detaining hand, as Slack, ashen to the throat, opened his mouth in a sort of sickly gasp. "I am merely uttering the judgment of J.C.X., whose spokesman I am for the time being. Your future, as mine, belongs utterly to the North Star. The day you took over the president's desk you became a pawn, body and soul. You knew that; it was put coldly to you. You accepted in the knowledge that the decisions of the anonymous head of the North Star Towing and Contracting Company must be absolute law, to be obeyed without equivocation of any kind.

"Slack, the North Star made you; picked you up when you were a hand-to-mouth, soap-box demagogue with about as much chance of carving a name in Canadian politics as a celluloid beetle has of cruising the drought-belts of hell. You were a brief-hunting, small-town lawyer in those days, dependent on the political crumbs the big fellows brushed off the table. If it hadn't been for a mean portion of party patronage you would have had to tackle honest toil or starve.

"Let me refresh your mind on what happened. You got into the political game in a small way. The North Star backed you with its money, its influence and its strategy. You won out against a stronger man—a victory that surprised no one more than yourself.

"You had the front, were a hail fellow and well met. The North Star needed a man of that very type with the *open sesame* to inner political circles. In a single day it elevated you from hopeless penury and insignificance to

the highest office in its gift as nominal head of the North Star and its coterie of subsidiary companies. You were made the master of millions, with precedence over many of us who had served the company faithfully since its earliest beginnings. What did you promise in return for all these things?

"Come here!"

Acey Smith, a strange, smouldering glow in his coal-black eyes that held the trembling Slack transfixed, took the other by the arm and led him to the south side of the office, to a window that overlooked the city, its smoked-smudged waterfront, the great lake and the rugged sweep of the North Shore.

"Don't you remember, John J.?" Acey Smith's voice was low and vibrant. "It was on this very hill, on the very site of this office, that I stood with my arm linked in yours as I stand now. You confessed to me your ruling passion was for power. You intimated you would sell your very soul to be great, to be mighty.

"I, as the representative of the powerful J.C.X., came to offer you the thing you craved most. I asked you to look to the South, to the East and to the West. As far as you could see and beyond would be your absolute domain. The North Star was prepared to make you ruler of the whole North Shore and the Upper Lakes, and a mighty force in the woods beyond and across the prairie West. You were to have power of a kind—a figurehead 'tis true—but executive power patently greater than any other one individual in this whole Dominion of Canada—and that was what your heart yearned for.

"There was a price named for this prize—you remember? It was your unquestioning obedience at all times to the will of J.C.X. None was to know whence your instructions came. This was all laid down very definitely

to you—and, you accepted gladly, without reservation.”

Slack stood dumb, his gaze averted from the accusing blaze of the other man's. His relentless inquisitor went on:—

“I need not here dilate on how the North Star has lived up to its covenant with you. Your family's social prominence here and at the Capital, the political honours that have been showered upon you all attest the might that was loaned you. The North Star has demanded only service in return and cared not whether it had your gratitude or not.

“Think you, Slack, that the power that made you a leader among men has not the will to cast you down again into the depths from which you came—that the unseen arm that reached out and lifted you to wealth and affluence has not the strength to unmake you and brush you from its path into the discard?

“Listen.” The voice beside Slack was terrible in its cold intensity. “The zero hour in the history of the North Star is about to strike. Strong men alone can guide its destinies through that critical hour; the North Star will brook no vacillating weakling at its helm when it heads out into the teeth of the tempest.

“I am authorised to bring you this message: *The fiat of J.C.X. is that you accept his recent instructions and carry them out to the letter or immediately vacate the presidency of the North Star.*”

IV

All the smug self-confidence had gone out of Slack, leaving him a towering mass of perspiring flabbiness. But there was a mulish streak in him that prevailed in the face of his trepidation.

He started to hark back to his primal grievance. "If it wasn't for this strike—"

"Forget the strike!" cut in Acey Smith. "The strike of the tugmen is a side-issue that will be forgotten long before a general election can be got under way. It will last only so long as it serves the ends of the North Star—a couple of weeks at the very most. But it must last until word comes from J.C.X. to settle it. The men will then be reinstated on their own terms with full back pay for the time they have been idle. The North Star wants no hardship to come to its men out of this incident. And, if the Hon. J. J. Slack, M.P., is then still president of the company, he shall have the full credit for making the magnanimous settlement."

Slack's face brightened. "I begin to see the light," he acknowledged.

"And the object?"

"Yes. This strike will preclude delivery of the poles at Nannabijou Bay to the Kam City Company's mills in time for them to live up to their agreement with the government."

"And they'd thus automatically forfeit their rights on the Nannabijou Limits," added Acey Smith, but the queer, half-pitying ghost of a smile that flickered at the corners of his mouth escaped the politician.

"I see, I see," reiterated Slack, "and, by virtue of that rider in the government contract, the limits would be returned to us on the terms of our old tender with an extension of time for the completion of our mill. Great Scott, that would mean too that the Kam City people would have a useless mill on their hands they'd be forced to turn over to the North Star at its own price. That's strategy for you, with a vengeance!"

"Good!" Acey Smith's approval came with a sardonic chuckle. "It is to be hoped the International Investment

Corporation and the Kam City Pulp and Paper Mills Company make the same wild deductions that you do, Slack."

Slack blanched under the rebuff. "Why, what do you mean?" he cried.

"Just this," replied the other. "Do you think the North Star would allow this tremendous issue to depend on such an obvious and clumsy piece of trickery? Why, man, the Kam City Company would have legal redress whereby they could force us to settle the strike and live up to our delivery contract in less than a week's time."

"Then what on earth is the object of the strike?"

"It's a blind—to *hide the real coup*."

"And the real coup?"

"One individual could answer that question—J.C.X."

Slack was silent a moment, then he blurted rather than asked: "Tell me as man to man, Smith, are you J.C.X.?"

"I have wondered that you did not ask me that before," returned the superintendent quietly. "I can inform you, as man to man, *I am not J.C.X.*"

"But come, Mr. Slack," he urged next moment. "We're wasting time, and I have yet some things to attend to before I catch the train east. What answer do I send from you to J.C.X. regarding those last instructions?"

"Tell him they will be carried out to the letter," admonished the president.

Acey Smith extended his hand. "I congratulate you, J.J.," he offered.

"Hold on, Smith," called Slack as the other turned to leave. "Wait till I get my coat and hat, and I'll be with you."

He went to a locker for the articles of wear. "We'll slip over to the club and have dinner together," he suggested. "You'll have lots of time to—"

There was an eerie emptiness to the ring of his voice in the room. He whirled with the sentence uncompleted.

Acey Smith was gone.

Slack shrugged uncomfortably. "Vanished," he muttered. "I can almost fancy a faint smell of brimstone fumes hangs about the place."

CHAPTER XVI

A HOAX THAT PROVED A BOOMERANG

I

“DON’T go away for a moment, Mr. Hammond.” Hammond watching the police with Rev. Nathan Stubbs as their captive disappeared up street, turned to see Martin Winch, the lawyer, hurry to his desk telephone.

“One—O—Two—Seven, North,” he called. “Bairdwell and Simms?— Could I speak to Mr. Simms?— Hello, Simms, Martin Winch of Winch, Stanton and Reid speaking— Simms, would you care to handle a police court case for us?— Yes, right away, if we can arrange the preliminary hearing for this afternoon— It’s a client of ours, Rev. Nathan Stubbs— Some trivial charge, yes— What we want is to get bail arranged, but there are reasons why we can’t very well be identified with the case just for the present— Will explain all that when I see you— Could you slip over to the district police court right now— Hold things until I get there with the bondsmen— That’s very decent of you, Simms, thank you.”

“We’re bound for the police station,” Winch explained as he hustled Hammond down the stairs to the street and into his car at the curb. “It might be essential to have you there, but whatever occurs keep a still mouth unless I tell you. Simms will do all the talking that is necessary.”

On the way Winch stopped opposite the entrance to a

business block, and, leaving Hammond in the car, hustled upstairs. Presently, he returned with two other men who jumped into the rear seat of the car and Winch started the machine without taking time to introduce them to Hammond.

Winch led the way into the district magistrate's office, where Rev. Nathan Stubbs was already arraigned before the magistrate. The two mounted police were swearing out papers for his incarceration on a nominal charge of vagrancy. Winch motioned Hammond to a seat in the rear of the auditorium and sat down beside him, while the two strangers, whom Hammond surmised were the bondsmen, went on up and inside the rail, where they were met by a sleek-looking young man, who, he knew, must be Simms. The prisoner straightened and a distinct look of relief came over his face.

It was all very formal, very monotonous, as preliminary hearings usually are. There was very little talking, and most of it in an undertone that didn't carry to the point where Hammond and Winch were sitting. The most audible sound was the scratching of the magistrate's pen. Finally it ceased, bail was put up and the magistrate announced the case adjourned until the following morning.

Winch asked Hammond to wait a moment and went forward and joined the group around the accused, now temporarily a free man on one thousand dollars security put up by the two strangers. Hammond was convinced Winch supplied the collateral.

The magistrate arose from his desk, and with customary abruptness the courtroom cleared. Winch, Simms, Rev. Nathan Stubbs and the two bondsmen left the building through a side door. Hammond found himself alone.

He was about to go in search of Winch when the latter appeared at the public entrance. "I beg your pardon,

Mr. Hammond," he apologised. "In my haste to get this beastly matter straightened out I had forgotten about you for the moment. As it happened, we did not need you, and I have to leave you to your own resources for a little while.

"Could you come up to my office, say in an hour?" Winch looked at his watch. "It's almost five now. Come up at six. You can't get back to the limits now until to-morrow morning at the earliest, and it is extremely important I should have a talk with you before you go."

The arrangement did not appeal as any too attractive to the young man, particularly in view of what happened at his afternoon interview with the lawyer, but he promised to abide by it.

II

At the appointed time Hammond went up to the legal offices of Winch, Stanton and Reid. An impatient-looking young male clerk was standing by the outer rail with hat and coat on ready to leave. The balance of the office staff had departed.

"Mr. Winch is engaged just now," said the clerk, "but he left word for you to wait here. He will call you when he is ready." Having delivered his message, the youth pushed through the double doors and ran downstairs three steps at a time.

Hammond swore under his breath. He hadn't bothered about his evening meal, thinking the session with Winch would be of short duration, and he was tired and hungry.

He could distinguish the rumble of low-pitched voices in Winch's private office, but could catch no word of what was said. Five minutes dragged by—ten—twenty—thirty. At a quarter to seven Hammond was furious enough to jump up and leave without giving any notice.

The door of Winch's office opened, and, Winch, poking his head out, called: "Come in, Mr. Hammond."

Hammond crossed the threshold and drew back in amazement. Standing by Winch's desk was a tall man, iron-grey of hair with a keen face and deepset, piercing dark eyes.

It was Norman T. Gildersleeve!

"How do you do, Mr. Hammond?" Mr. Gildersleeve greeted the young man quietly, extending his hand. "You weren't quite prepared to meet me here?"

"Scarcely, Mr. Gildersleeve, but"—Hammond was regaining his composure—"I've become quite used to running into the unexpected since I parted with you on the night of September the twenty-third."

Gildersleeve smiled. "Quite so, quite so," he agreed. "However, we've decided to acquaint you with some of the missing details that have been baffling you, Mr. Hammond, though I must confess that there are a few things that we would like to know more about ourselves. Later on—"

"Yes, at the club, after dinner," briskly cut in Martin Winch. "You and Mr. Hammond can get together in a side room and thresh the whole thing out. We'd better hurry over if we don't wish to be locked out of the café."

They departed in Winch's car. At the City Club, Norman T. Gildersleeve's appearance created no sudden sensation among the scattered few that were present. Apparently, the New York capitalist was not readily recognised, though his picture had appeared many times in the papers since his disappearance. Hon. J. J. Slack, M.P., who was a late arrival, alone picked him out. Slack came striding over to the table where Gildersleeve, Winch and Hammond sat awaiting their order.

"As I live," he cried, "if it isn't Norman Gildersleeve in the flesh!"

"Hush," admonished Gildersleeve in an undertone as the other gripped his hand. "I am anxious for this matter to slip over with as little notoriety as possible."

"But you've already got all the notoriety that's coming to you," laughed Slack. "The papers have been full of nothing else since you dropped out of sight. Where on earth have you been?"

Gildersleeve shrugged. "Oh, just on a little private hunting trip above Moose Horn," he replied. "I needed a rest and thought I'd take it in on my way here."

Slack's brows went up ever so slightly. "Bag any big fellows?"

He asked it innocently enough, but Hammond thought he caught the faintest of sarcastic inflexions.

Gildersleeve ignored the question. "Now that I'm back," he remarked, "I'm anxious to see the pulp and paper mill get under way in time. By the way, Slack, how is the North Star getting on with the poles?"

"Swimmingly, swimmingly," repeated the politician. "Nannabijou Bay is jammed almost to the last inch with timber. Away over the contract cut, I believe."

"That's fine. How about delivery?"

"Starts next week, soon as we get the last of our dredging contracts off our hands," replied Slack. "We'll have our whole fleet of equipment on the job."

"Then there's nothing in this talk that is going around of a strike among your tugmen?"

"Absolutely nothing," emphatically assured Slack. "The North Star never had a strike in its history. The men tried to put up a bluff of going out, at the instigation of a nest of agitators, but they'll never go out—they know better than to try any of that stuff on us. See you later, Gildersleeve."

Gildersleeve's eyes trailed after Slack's retreating fig-

ure in a fixed, hard glitter. "When Ananias quit the job, he never dreamed he would have so illustrious a successor," he commented grimly. "Slack's one grand qualification for the presidency of the North Star is his magnificent ability as an unmitigated liar."

The meal progressed in comparative silence. It was after they had retired to the privacy of a side room that Hammond, prompted by curiosity he had until now curbed, asked casually: "By the way, Mr. Winch, what became of the camp preacher you bailed out this afternoon—the Rev. Nathan Stubbs?"

Winch looked at Gildersleeve and they both smiled cynically. "He has disappeared—vanished in thin air, as you might say," enlightened Winch.

"And left you in the air with bail?"

"It was cheap to lose him at any price," spoke up Gildersleeve with a frown. "He was through with his job—and damned good riddance!"

III

Hammond began to see the drift of things. "So the preacher was a detective in your employ?" he surmised.

"Exactly—and you were sent out there as a foil to keep them guessing," replied Gildersleeve. "He went in the disguise of preacher because it was the easiest rôle to get away with without suspicion, every sort of preacher being allowed the run of the camps on account of some eccentric whim of the superintendent."

"And your disappearance was—also a blind?"

"You've got the idea. I told Slack just now I was on a hunting trip, which was true—except that I was hunting inside information, not moose. To make absolutely sure of no leaks, Winch here was the only one in

the plot with me. The arrest of the bogus preacher might have been a costly blunder if we hadn't got him out before his identity was discovered."

"How did they get the charge of vagrancy against him?"

"The Lord only knows. Smith and the gang of crooks who use him as a crafty, unscrupulous tool in their nefarious enterprises seem to have even the police of the country in their power. At any rate, Stubbs was arrested on a nominal charge of vagrancy, but ostensibly for some unnamed crime he was supposed to have committed on the limits.

"Now, Mr. Hammond," continued the head of the International Investment Corporation, "I think I'd better be a little more explicit about matters before I come to a new proposal I have to make to you. You are fairly well acquainted with the facts in connection with the previous struggle with the Kam City Pulp and Paper Mills Company, of which my corporation is the parent, and the North Star Towing and Contracting Company, are you not?—how we succeeded in getting the rights on the limits this October, pending the opening of our mill?"

Hammond nodded. "One way and another I have picked up a fairly good notion of the situation," he affirmed.

"What you may not know," continued the other, "is that a former Canadian company, of which I was the head, was behind many of the rival enterprises which tried to fight the North Star in this country, and failed. In fact, we, the pioneers in development work on the North Shore, were actually driven out by the North Star, whose crafty, underhand methods and strange power over the ruling authorities in government circles made it impossible to meet them in a fair fight. I was a heavy loser through those ventures, and, I may tell you that

millions are at stake in this present undertaking projected to break the backbone of the slimy North Star outfit.

"But we got the edge on them this time from the start—and we intend to keep it. Nevertheless, I had no illusions as to the intentions of the North Star since the screws were put down tight on them by the new provincial government. I knew if there were a loop-hole through which they could slip to prevent delivery of poles to our mill in time to allow of operation on the date fixed in our agreement with the government that they would take full advantage of it.

"Early last June I placed several secret agents in one guise and another in the North Star's camps, keeping close tab on operations and sending in regular reports. They could discover no grounds for suspecting trickery, however, except that the superintendent, A. C. Smith, was inaccessible and his comings and goings in the camp were as mysterious as the man himself.

"Then one day, toward the latter end of the summer, all our secret agents, who had secured positions as clerks, cookees and lumberjacks, were summarily dismissed and given twenty-four hours to get off the limits—all with the exception of an expert ex-secret service man from Chicago, Arnold by name, who kept his place in the camp as a consumptive landscape artist. Arnold made the discovery that there was some secret rendezvous up in the hill known as the Cup of Nannabijou, to which he was convinced Acey Smith repaired, though he was never able to trace him there. He further had a theory that the unknown powers behind the North Star were kept in touch with affairs through a wireless plant secreted in the Cup.

"That was the last report we received from Arnold. News afterward appeared in the papers that Arnold's hat had been found floating in a creek up on the hill, and

it was surmised that he had fallen into the rapids of the creek and was dashed to death.

"Arnold, however, eventually turned up, alive, in Chicago, and later came to my office in New York. The truth of the matter was he had been waylaid on the banks of the creek, overpowered and drugged while he was endeavouring to find the entrance to the Cup. He recovered consciousness in the room of a waterfront hotel in this city, where he found on the dresser a parcel and a bulky envelope. The parcel contained the loose cash he had, in his pockets when attacked, his watch, fountain pen and a new hat similar to the one that fell off his head into the creek during his struggle with unknown assailants. In the envelope were all the pencilled notes he had made and secreted under the floor of his shack, and under the envelope he found a railway time-table with the connections between Kam City and Chicago under-scored. Arnold was quite fed up with the way they did things in Canada, and he took the obvious hint.

"All this made it the more imperative that I place some one on the limits who could get to the bottom of what coup the North Star was planning. I decided to come North myself to keep in close touch. In order to put our rivals and their spies off the scent and lend them a false notion of security, I planned to suddenly disappear off the train before it reached Kam City. Winch was not to discover this until the following morning and then see that my remarkable disappearance was given the widest possible publicity in the newspapers.

"It was while on the way to Kam City that I was impressed with the advantages of having a foil for the camp preacher in his work—some one whose entrance into the camps at about the same time as himself would arouse Acey Smith's curiosity and suspicion and keep him for a time off the right track. I talked the plan

over with Winch, and the result was we engaged you.

"Now there was no absolute certainty that Slack would take any cognizance of my request to find you a job on the limits, and possibly less that Acey Smith would take you on, even if he did, but I built on their curiosity being so aroused that they would employ you just to get at the bottom of what you were sent there for. Your entire ignorance of any definite object on the limits would, I conjectured, further baffle Smith. In the meantime, while his suspicions were focussed on you, Stubbs was to get in his good work. The result up to the time of your leaving the limits and Stubbs' arrest was eminently satisfactory."

"You think my leaving precipitated Stubbs into trouble then?" asked Hammond.

"No, I wouldn't say that," replied Gildersleeve. "Stubbs at the last minute tried to prevent your getting on the tug before it left, but that wasn't what was at the bottom of his arrest. However, you both did well to stay out there as long as you did. We discovered the North Star's plot to prevent delivery of the poles in time to frustrate it, we hope."

"The strike?"

"You've guessed it. And the strike, as you have likely further surmised, has been cunningly engineered by the North Star principals themselves, though, mind you, that would be a difficult thing to prove and a dangerous statement to make publicly."

"But," contended Hammond, "the North Star must have known that, under the existing circumstances, you could bring government pressure to bear to force them to settle the strike and deliver the poles as per the contract."

"True, but therein lay the very advantage of our knowledge in advance they were bringing this strike on," ex-

plained the other. "We have thus been enabled to get in private touch with the attorney-general, as well as the minister of forests and mines, so that the minute the strike breaks a fiat will come through ordering the North Star to submit their strike to a swift arbitration. We did not suppose the North Star was relying on the strike alone to tie up delivery, but took it as a means to another end, which, undoubtedly was to have the plants in their various tugs blown up and disabled. The blame would be laid at the door of extremists among the strikers and they would thus be so crippled they could not move a pole from the limits to get our mills running on time.

"But we took care of that part of it," continued Gildersleeve. "We got the mounted police on the job of watching not only the booms at the limits, but the North Star's waterfront property in this city as well. Incidentally, to make doubly sure of not being trapped, we wired Duluth to have tugs and equipment ready to send over to us on a moment's notice."

"You knew that Acey Smith is leaving for Montreal to-night?" asked Hammond.

"We did," said Gildersleeve. "The superintendent took care to have that generally noised about; there's even an item in both local papers to-night about his trip. It has never been Acey Smith's habit to advertise his personal movements, so we can discount that as another 'red herring' drawn over the trail. Just the same we have two detectives shadowing the pulp camp superintendent's movements."

Hammond had to smile over the idea. "Might as well send two men to shadow a timber wolf," he observed ironically.

"Or the Devil himself," agreed Gildersleeve. "However, I don't think there's much to worry about in that

direction. Now we've come to a matter that I would like to talk over with you privately, Mr. Hammond—if Mr. Winch doesn't mind."

"Not the least," said Winch. "If you think you'll not be over-long I'll wait for you in the rotunda, Norman."

"We'll not be long, Martin," he was assured by Gildersleeve.

IV

"There are two loose ends out at those camps I want to have cleared up right away," briskly opened Gildersleeve when the door closed behind Winch. "The one is what the North Star has hidden up in the Cup of Nannabijou, and the other is the purpose of that girl staying out on Amethyst Island."

Hammond started. "You mean Miss Stone?"

"Yes. The fact that you got on intimate terms with her should be a very valuable asset to us. I suppose you've guessed that Stubbs was the one who so cleverly brought about your meeting with her?"

"No, I had not guessed it."

"H'm—well! Let's get to the point, Mr. Hammond: What all did you find out from her?"

"Please be a little more explicit, Mr. Gildersleeve: Just what are you driving at?"

"I'm sorry. I may not have made myself quite clear. Just what is her little part in the mystery out at the limits?"

Hammond suppressed his irritation. "Miss Stone has absolutely no connection with the North Star's intrigues; of that I am certain," he replied emphatically. "She is as much mystified, I am sure, by the strange occurrences at the limits as we have been."

"She hypnotised you into believing that?" There was a politely shaded sneer in Gildersleeve's tone. "Now

see here, Hammond, you must remember we are dealing with the cleverest coterie of arch crooks on the American continent. There is nothing in the finer arts of intrigue and blackmail they have not practised in the past to gain their ends. They have never had equals for cunning and resourcefulness.

"Such precedent alone," he pointed out, "should warn us that that girl with her pretty face has been introduced at this particular juncture with a purpose, if I hadn't deeper reasons for conviction in the matter. My proposal therefore is that you go back to the limits, further cultivate the acquaintance of Miss Stone and find out as quickly as possible for your own benefit as well as ours all you can about her in that direction."

Hammond had risen. "I think we may as well break off all our connection right now, Mr. Gildersleeve," he said coldly. "I am going back to the limits, but this time let it be understood I'm going on my own."

Gildersleeve at a glance took in the determination written in the young man's face. "I see—I see," he muttered significantly. "Well, in that case, Mr. Hammond—can we expect you to respect our previous confidences?"

"So far as it may be honourable and lawful to do so, yes."

Somehow Hammond sensed that reply rankled Gildersleeve, but the latter responded, almost suavely: "Very well then, call around at Winch's office in the morning and there'll be a cheque waiting you to cover payment for your services according to our contract. Good-night!"

He held the door for Hammond to pass out.

CHAPTER XVII

OGIMA BUSH

I

STRANGE events took place on the Nannabijou Limits during the morning of the day Hammond left by tug for Kam City.

Josephine Stone arose early after a restless night of nervous dread of she knew not what. There had been disturbing incidents that had contributed to her trepidation. When she had returned to the island after her fright at encountering the Indian wizard, Ogima Bush, on the trail, she found Mrs. Johnson, her companion, was absent. Inquiry of her Indian woman-of-all-work, brought out fragmentary information that Mrs. Johnson had left shortly after Miss Stone and Hammond had set out on their trip up Nannabijou Hill.

"Two men come in boat," said the girl, "and big lady go way with them."

"But, Mary," insisted Miss Stone, "didn't she leave any message—didn't she tell you any words to tell me?"

"Maybe tell Mary—don't know. They talk fast. Walk fast. Go way fast—in put-put boat. Maybe go some place big lady know, for she laugh and look—glad. Mary think she say she not come back for long time."

"Which way did the boat go?"

The Indian girl swung her arm to the west. "Maybe go to city, don't know."

Mrs. Johnson must have been sent for hurriedly. Most

likely she had received an urgent message from her home in Calgary. Something sudden must have happened, but Josephine Stone could not imagine the considerate Mrs. Johnson leaving without an explanation. She again frantically searched every possible place in the cottage for sign of a note that she might have left behind. There was none.

The messengers in the boat must have brought a telegram from Calgary to her. Perhaps, in her excitement, she had forgotten to leave a message of explanation. But just what sort of news Mrs. Johnson could have received that would make her laugh and "look glad," as the Indian girl had said, was more than she could imagine.

"Mary," Miss Stone demanded, "did you see the men give Mrs. Johnson a piece of paper to read before she left?"

"Maybe give piece of paper. Mary don't know."

It was utterly no use. The girl could tell her nothing, and her brother Henry, who looked after the boats and cut the wood when he was not engaged in the glorious Indian pursuit of doing nothing, was even more stoically stupid.

After a night of fitful rest, when she had tried to compose her mind that everything would turn out all right, she rose with an ominous presentiment. Even after she had had breakfast and had gone out for a short stroll around the island, the glory of the autumn morning did not tend to dissipate her depression.

As she was nearing the cottage door on her return, the white glare of a large, bell-shaped military tent struck on the clearing of a hill some distance south on the lake-shore caught her attention. Soon picturesque figures appeared about the tent—stalwart-looking chaps in scarlet tunics, stiff-brimmed stetsons and dark trousers

with wide gold braid stripes. She instantly recognised them as Canadian mounted police and remembered that Acey Smith had said the day previous that an outpost of the mounties would possibly be stationed somewhere near Amethyst Island.

The young policemen were busying themselves about a small camp-fire, evidently preparing an outdoor breakfast, their gay chatter and outbursts of laughter ringing strangely clear on the limpid morning air. . . . Then from out of the woods there came a single soft stroke of the gong of Nannabijou.

The figures round the camp-fire stood one moment in silent mystification; then, as if they had simultaneously made the discovery, their gaze was turned on the figure of Josephine Stone. One of the men focussed a field-glass upon her, and the girl, embarrassed by the attention she was provoking, moved back into the shelter of the trees.

She could not bear to return to the interior of the cottage. An overpowering sense of an intangible something out there in the woods had taken such a hold on her she quaked at times as with the cold. It was as if unseen eyes watched her every movement from the fastnesses; as though a designing, hating presence prowled out there, always watching—waiting. She could not entirely account for the sensation. So far, she had never been afraid, alone as she and Mrs. Johnson had been so far as white company was concerned. Partly, of course, it came of her fright at the unexpected meeting with Ogima Bush on the trail, the unexplained departure of Mrs. Johnson and the urgent demand of Acey Smith that she leave the island, because of an unnamed danger, until the appointed time for meeting J.C.X.

J.C.X.!

The very name now seemed to fill her with dread. Previously she had pictured a dashing czar of the bush camps, handsome as he was poetic by nature. At one time she had even suspected that J.C.X. was none other than Acey Smith himself. Now she knew that could not be the fact; she knew now that the timber boss of the Nannabijou Limits, iron man though he was in other respects, bent abjectly to the sinister influence and will of some powerful factor he lived in constant dread of and dare not explain. The remorse that had been in his tones when yesterday he had spoken of "the Man That Might Have Been" had uttered volumes as to the mental and spiritual shackles he had allowed to be placed upon his better self. Why had he so contemptuously referred to the tragic ending of the career of Captain Carlstone? Had the gallant soldier also been vassal to the grim J.C.X. and killed himself to escape his despair?

She now heartily wished she had never come to Amethyst Island—that she had not pressed on Acey Smith to bring about a meeting with J.C.X. If J.C.X. were a presentable human being of sane and upright character, why was it not possible for Acey Smith to induce him to come to meet her, instead of asking her, an unprotected stranger, to journey she knew not where to gain the information referred to in his letter? True, she trusted Acey Smith so far as her personal safety was concerned; her woman's intuition told her that, away from the weird outside influence that seemed to dominate him body and soul, he possessed the born instincts of a gentleman—but, under its sway, it was problematical what he might not be capable of doing.

That was one of the reasons she had refused to leave the island for an undesignated destination without notifying any one—the other was Louis Hammond. Louis Hammond would surely come to-day—when she so

sorely needed him. Instinctively her eyes searched the lakeshore trail in search of a youthful, buoyant figure.

II

Josephine Stone was startled from her reverie by the parting of the shrubbery down by the island shore. Five tall, powerful-looking Indians sprang into view.

In the lead was a ghastly figure—the Indian Medicine Man who had so startled her in the trail yesterday.

A face more sinister than his would be difficult to conceive. Dark, almost to the blackness of an African, his features bespoke evil cunning and a sense of power that was made the more disconcerting by the livid red gashes on the cheek-bones and by the brilliant jet-black eyes around which the whites showed garishly. Straight, lank black hair fell to his shoulders, where row upon row of glistening white wolves' teeth were arrayed. He wore no head adornment save a single eagle's feather stuck in a band of purple at the back of his head.

"Henry!" Josephine Stone called to her Indian man-of-all-work. The latter and his sister came out of the house and took places by her side, but she could see they were quaking with fear.

The quintette from the woods came to an abrupt halt before them. For the moment Josephine Stone felt reassured on noting they carried no arms. The weird figure in the foreground bowed low, while his four companions stood motionless as carved statues.

"Wonderful white lady," he addressed her in low, guttural tones whose enunciation was perfect. "Ogima Bush, the Medicine Man, brings this message: It is the will of Ogima's master that the white lady go from here."

In her trepidation and bewilderment, Josephine Stone could scarcely find words to reply. "I do not under-

stand," she faltered. "Am I—ordered off this island?"

The Medicine Man bowed again. "It is the will of Ogima's master," he repeated. "The white lady is to go from here with Ogima. No harm will come to her."

His eyes flamed upon Henry and his sister standing by her side, as he addressed them sharply; commands in the Objibiway tongue that were like flying knife-blades.

Like galvanised automatons, Miss Stone's servants moved away and marched down to the waterfront.

Their treacherous behaviour brought out the spirit of the girl. For the moment, in her disgust, she forgot her own perilous predicament. "Cowards!" she cried after them, "to be frightened by a cheap fakir.

"As for you," and she turned her flashing eyes upon the Medicine Man, "go back and tell your master the white lady says he can go—to the devil!"

White with anger she swayed, a beautiful figure of defiance—a fragile white woman, alone, mocking a powerful savage. The Medicine Man's head went up, his black eyes gleaming admiration—and something else, something that burned into her very soul in its ravishing masterfulness. His lips parted and from them came a sibilant gasp.

Next instant he stepped forward; a swift, panther-like movement. She sprang out of his grasp and swift as light sped back through the cottage door. From a handbag just inside she snatched out a small automatic.

She whirled the pistol into his face. "Now, you get out of here," she cried, "or I'll—shoot to kill!"

Ogima Bush paused. But instead of leaping back, he drew himself to his full height and calmly folded his arms, the faintest traces of a smile about his mouth as he looked down into the muzzle of the deadly little gun. "If wonderful white lady shoot," he said calmly, "she see a man die."

In that moment, for all his wicked hideousness, the Indian was magnificent. He was facing death, gambling on a one remote chance that she could not thus deliberately slay him.

Josephine Stone hesitated, her finger trembling at the trigger. She never exactly knew how it happened so quickly, but in the winking of an eye the red man's left hand flew out and closed over her wrist and fingers. The automatic spat harmlessly past his cheek out into the open and was flung from her hand to the floor. She felt herself whisked from her feet as lightly as if she had been a child. She scratched and tore at his face and throat impotently as he leaped through the doorway and raced across the island to the beach.

Josephine Stone screamed and screamed again. He made no attempt to stop her; his low, mocking laugh was her only answer. But over his shoulder she saw that her cries had had the desired result. Five mounted policemen standing in astonishment by their tent on the hill up the lakeshore sprang forward and tore down toward the island.

Ogima Bush with his burden stepped into the stern of a big rowboat, and at his command two of his husky bucks bent over the oars and made the craft fairly shoot across the intervening gap to the mainland. The others of the party had apparently crossed previously.

The bow of the boat was barely beached when Ogima Bush leaped out into the shallow water with the girl. As if by magic the Indian oarsmen disappeared into the curtain of the woods. The Medicine Man followed, tearing through the trees and dense growth as swiftly and skillfully as a flying moose, at the same time protecting her so that not even a branch scratched against her face or caught in her garments.

Far behind she could occasionally catch sounds of the

floundering efforts of the pursuing policemen. Twice she tried to cry out to attract their attention, but all her strength seemed to have left her and it was all she could do to ward off a swoon. He seemed to carry her with as great ease as he might a babe, and she had to admit to herself with a certain deference and respect.

The crashings of the policemen through the bush behind them grew fainter and fainter and finally were lost in the distance.

Presently Ogima Bush stepped out upon a winding man-wide trail. He stood listening a moment, then gave vent to three calls like a crow. An answering "caw, caw, caw" came from the right just ahead. The Medicine Man plunged forward.

Another turn brought them to what was to Josephine Stone more familiar territory. They were on the trail that led across Solomon Creek to the foot of the cliffs of Nannabijou. She saw that they had come by a more difficult but much shorter route than the one by which she and Louis Hammond had come up the day previous. At the approach to the creek bridge four Indians stepped out each holding a handle of a crude sedan built of poles and cedar boughs. Muttering low commands in the Objibiway tongue, the Medicine Man placed Josephine Stone on the cross-seat fashioned between the two main poles. The girl recognised the folly of offering further resistance to her captors; her only resource now, she knew, was to await a strategic moment for escape. At a grunt from Ogima Bush the carriers plunged forward and across the bridge with their burden, the Medicine Man striding behind them.

The young woman experienced a distinct sense of relief at being free from the encircling arms of the grisly Indian. She now had opportunity of scrutinising the four carriers. They were not any of them the same

Indians as those who had accompanied the Medicine Man to her cottage. Each of these men wore a single eagle's feather in his hair, similar to the one affected by the Medicine Man. The girl remembered that the single feather was the insignia of chiefship and that no red man save a witch doctor or headman of the tribe dared venture into the zone of the Cup of Nannabijou, whose black cliffs frowned menacingly upon her from above.

III

Josephine Stone's feelings were a mixture of wonder and apprehension as the strange-looking party crossed Solomon Creek, toiled up the trail and finally debouched into the passageway in the cliffs that led to the tunnel she and Hammond had visited.

In the interim she had time for cool reflection. Rescue was for the present beyond question, away up in these wild hills, and she knew any attempt on her part at escape would be equally hopeless. It would be quite as futile to attempt to gain information as to the object of her abduction from her sombre captors. It suddenly struck her that her visit with Hammond to the water-sealed entrance to the Cup of Nannabijou might have had something to do with her present plight. She knew the Indians looked upon the vicinity of the Cup as forbidden ground. The priests of the mystic region might be determined to have an explanation of the trespass, or worse still, be intent on punishing the offenders. Acey Smith's reference of the day before to an enemy whom he seemed to fear might molest her during his absence recurred to her. No doubt the superintendent had been well-intentioned when he had insisted that she leave the island with him. He might have had his own good reasons for being mysterious about it, and now she had

ugly proof of a real danger he probably had in mind.

Her reflections were cut short by the sudden entrance of the party into the gloom of the tunnel, down which they carried her carefully to the point where it opened out on the rocky brink of the roaring mountain torrent. The bearers paused and let the sedan down on the four short posts that served for legs. Not one of them spoke or committed a motion. She glanced backward. Had it not been for the blinking eyes of the men behind her, they could have represented figures of bronze. Ogima Bush had disappeared.

Her eyes were momentarily blinded by a wicked green flash of light that illuminated the passageway, and with it came a deep gonglike alarum from above.

There was a vibrating, thundering sound, and with its advent the waters in the stream channel began to drop; dwindled swiftly to a mere trickle and finally disappeared entirely except for the moisture retained on the smooth-worn rock of its bed.

Amazement was still upon Josephine Stone when she heard Ogima Bush utter a guttural command at her side. He had reappeared as silently as he had dropped out of sight and now walked with a firm hand to the side of the sedan as the bearers carried it down the stone steps to the bed of the stream.

They moved only about fifty or sixty yards, around a very abrupt curve, when they came to a stop opposite another short flight of steps leading to a tunnel through the cliffs similar to the one by which they had entered the stream-bed below.

Once in the tunnel, Ogima Bush again disappeared. Josephine Stone heard the gonglike alarum, the roar of released torrents, and the waters went sweeping down the channel they had just emerged from.

Just how the stream was diverted from and returned

to the portion of its course that formed a section of the passageway up into the Cup she was curious to understand. She fancied that a dam or shut-off was manipulated by some one in charge above on signals sent by means of the gong.

In the weird novelty of it all the girl almost forgot her own precarious situation; that she was the captive of a lawless Indian magician, whose cunning, wicked face was an index of the unscrupulous, ruthless soul that lay behind the black eyes whose whites showed with such savage garishness. Furthermore, for the moment, the fact that she knew nothing of whom she was to be taken before or the fate that might await her had ceased to weigh heavily upon her mind. The adventurous side of it and curiosity to know what was the object of it all engrossed her more.

With a suddenness that made her eyes wince they moved out from the semi-gloom of the tunnel to the bright sunlight of the open.

They were on the inside of the Cup of Nannabijou.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE CUP!

I

JOSEPHINE STONE gasped involuntarily at the restful beauty of the scene that lay before her.

It was like a bit of some fantastic fairyland cached away up in the hills, surrounded on all sides as it was by what seemed an unbroken and impregnable wall of black cliffs.

To her left and occupying almost half the area inside the Cup right up to the cliffs back of her, where its overflow escaped through a narrow opening, reposed a mountain lake like a silver-grey mirror reflecting the walls of the Cup on the further side in absolute clarity of detail. To the right, from the point by which the party had entered, the land rose at a gentle grade till it reached the foot of the walls of rock on that side and the farther end possibly three-quarters of a mile away. Back of the clear area of green sward at the lake-front was a great forest of glistening white birch trees making a natural background for a landscape picture indescribably perfect in the dull gold of the morning sunlight.

But it was the vast green plot up which the carriers were transporting her over a winding, gravelled walk, bordered to either side with shrubs and small electric light standards such as are used in city parks, that most amazed the young woman. Miniature fountains, built of amethyst encrusted rock, were set out here and there in little green "islands" isolated by means of linked

circles branching out at regular intervals from the main gravelled path.

Before them, in the centre of the great lawn, stood a great rambling building, constructed of unbarked cedar, with screened verandahs and odd-looking little towers at its corners. Some little distance from this château was a smaller building and before it on high, white-painted poles were what were unmistakably wireless aërials. Heavy copper wires carried up on a series of poles from a point back in the opening of the cliffs indicated that somewhere in the cascades formed by the overflow of the lake a hydro-electric plant was located, whence the current was brought for light and power to this strange habitation in the heart of the wilderness.

Once Josephine Stone looked back into the face of Ogima Bush. On the instant she thought she caught a quizzical, amused expression on his swarthy visage, as though the Medicine Man were actually enjoying her bewilderment. But his features relapsed as quickly into the grim, stoical lines they habitually held, so that only the wicked eyes above the livid red gashes in his cheeks seemed alive and human.

As the party approached the château a plump, middle-aged woman with a kindly, beaming face came out on the verandah and down the steps to the walk.

It was Mrs. Johnson, Miss Stone's companion.

The Indians eased down the sedan, and, as Miss Stone stepped out, quickly carried it away to the rear of the château, Ogima Bush striding away with them.

"Josie!" cried the elder woman as she embraced the other. "I was really beginning to think something had happened."

Bewildered, the girl looked into the face of her friend. "Happened?" she echoed. "I should say something *has* happened. I never dreamed of meeting you here."

"Why Josie, dear, what's wrong? Didn't you send word for me to come yesterday morning?"

"I send word? I never sent any such word: I didn't know I was coming myself!"

"Well, for the land's sake! They came after you had gone away with Mr. Hammond yesterday morning and told me you were moving right away back to a bungalow in the mountain. Mr. Smith said—"

"Mr. Smith—the superintendent? Was he there?"

"Why, yes, Josie. It was he who suggested that it would much facilitate matters if I came here first to see that the Indian help set the bungalow in order. He was awfully nice about it, and they took me around the other side of the point in his motorboat. Then the Indians carried me up in that sedan to the entrance you came through to-day."

"Well!" It was all Josephine Stone could say for her pent-up indignation. So this was Acey Smith's work!

She saw through it all now. He had thought she would immediately accept his suggestion yesterday morning and come up to this place; so sure had he been, that he had lured Mrs. Johnson up here while she was out with Louis Hammond. Then—then when she had refused unless he explained, he had hired that hateful, horrible Indian and his band to carry her off by force. When she next saw Acey Smith—well, he'd know a piece of her mind about it!

But the elder woman was proceeding: "When the afternoon passed and you didn't come, I began to feel worried, Josie, until word was brought up by one of the Indians that you couldn't come till this morning. I was a little nervous in that big house all alone except for those Indians, but they seemed ready to do everything for me and I kept the electric lights going all night. Really, dear, it's a wonderful place. Like something you'd read

about in a story-book—old, old furniture, great big rooms and huge fire-places and wall mirrors. And away off in one wing is a library full of queer books, and back of it again is a laboratory such as scientists use. But it's locked up and you can see through the glass door that there's dust over everything and it hasn't been used for years."

But Josephine Stone was too exhausted by her exciting morning's experience to talk, let alone go about exploring the house. Her limbs seemed trembling under her as she entered the door. The reaction of a sleepless night and the events of the morning were commencing to tell on her. So, directly after Mrs. Johnson had procured her a hot cup of tea, she went direct to the room in the western end of the building which the elder woman said had been set aside for her. She flung herself on the bed without troubling to even take her shoes off, and pulling the coverlet over her dropped off to sleep immediately.

II

It was two hours later—almost eleven o'clock—when she awoke, quite refreshed. There was a light tapping at her chamber door. She leaped from the bed, adjusted her rumpled hair by the glass and smoothed out her skirt. She opened the door to find Mrs. Johnson in the hall accompanied by two Indians bearing a hamper. The Indians, at Mrs. Johnson's direction, carried the hamper into the room and departed.

To her delight, Miss Stone found it to contain, neatly packed, her wardrobe from the cottage at Amethyst Island as well as her toilet articles and other personal effects.

"That awful-looking Indian and the two that just went out brought it," explained Mrs. Johnson, which set

Josephine Stone pondering over the sagacity which the wily Ogima Bush must have employed to revisit the island and safely spirit away her belongings under the very noses of the police.

While she was dressing, Miss Stone told the elder woman as much as she thought it policy to tell her of the events in connection with her forcible removal from Amethyst Island to the Cup of Nannabijou.

Mrs. Johnson listened with growing amazement. "I had thought—in fact, I was sure—that it was an arrangement between you and Mr. Smith," she gasped. "I had no idea—"

"Oh, it was—in a way, pre-arranged," hastily replied the girl. "But it was not entirely according to what I had planned. Do you think there is any way we could make our escape—at night, for instance—if we found it necessary?"

Mrs. Johnson shook her head emphatically. "This place is surrounded by an unscalable wall of cliffs," she said. "There are but two openings; the one you came in where they turn the waters of the lake in by means of some gate operated by electric power and another tunnel through the cliffs down to the edge of Lake Superior on the northwestern side."

"Why couldn't we get out the latter way?"

"Because, Josie, it is merely a tunnel going down to the edge of the big lake or an inlet from it. That's the way they get in their supplies for this place from the boats, but the upper end is closed by great, heavy double doors which are kept securely locked. They have some system of signals by which the Indians here are notified when a boat docks at the mouth of the tunnel."

"And isn't there any one in authority here besides those Indians?" insisted Miss Stone. "Are you sure

there are no other buildings in the Cup besides these?"

"There are none that I have seen trace of, and I have heard no one giving orders except that frightful Ogima Bush. But," and Mrs. Johnson lowered her voice, "I *have* felt every hour I have been in this place that there is some one or something one never sees or hears—"

Her words were cut short by a hissing, crackling disturbance that suddenly broke loose in the upper air outside.

Mrs. Johnson reassuringly placed a hand upon her companion's arm. "It is only the wireless, dear," she explained. "It has sputtered away like that a couple of times since I've been here, but who operates it, unless it be one of the Indians, I have not been able to find out.

"Oh, yes, I had almost forgotten to tell you," she added suddenly, "that hideous Indian Medicine Man seems to be hanging around outside to see you about something." She went to the window and peered out. "He's gone at last," she observed. "He had been waiting around out on the lawn over there since he and the other two brought your belongings. I asked him if there was any message he had to leave; but he only made a noise in his throat like the snarl of a wild beast and walked away."

III

It was a few moments later that Josephine Stone, while walking down to the shore of the little lake, was suddenly confronted by Ogima Bush.

He bowed low, holding in an extended hand a folded note.

Wonderingly, the girl accepted the missive which was addressed to her in a firm spencerian hand. When she had opened it she read with amazement greater still:—

DEAR MISS STONE:—This is principally to set at rest any fears on your part as to your personal safety. No harm can reach you where you are, and at most you will not be asked to remain there for more than a few days.

Believe me, it was not part of my plan that you should have had to go through the disagreeable experience that befell you this morning, which, for reasons I hope to be able to explain later, I was unable to prevent without endangering your interests. Circumstances promoted by others over whom I had no control did that.

If there is any detail for your comfort or convenience which may have been overlooked, please advise me. The bearer of this note, Mr. Ogima Bush, is absolutely trustworthy so far as the affairs of my friends are concerned. Mr. Bush will therefore safely convey any message you may have for me before I leave this afternoon for the east. Yours to command,

ACEY SMITH.

"You wait here." Josephine Stone addressed the Indian, who stood with eyes averted to the gravel walk.

"Un-n-n-n ugh," he gutturalled. "Ogima wait."

She hurried back to the château and returned with a pencil and some sheets of paper. Seating herself on a little rustic bench, she three times started a reply to Acey Smith's note, but each time failed to find words coldly expressive of her contempt for the man who could knowingly allow her to suffer the indignities she had met with that morning.

Finally she tore all the sheets into little shreds and flung them angrily to the ground. Into the sinister face of the Indian there came a look of actual apprehension as she arose from the bench.

"Tell Mr. Smith I have no answer for him!"

The Medicine Man pointed to the torn bits of paper on the walk. "Maybe Ogima tell Big Boss white lady make words many times and throw away."

Miss Stone's eyes were blazing as she stamped her

little foot on the gravel. "You tell him what I told you to tell him—nothing more!"

The Medicine Man quailed before the white wrath of the girl, a ridiculous, crestfallen creature for the moment in his savage trappings. "Un-n-n-n, Ogima tell him what white lady say—no more," he answered supinely with a hand above his head as though to ward off an expected blow. "Big Boss maybe get heap mad; tell poor Ogima he lie."

"I hope he beats you within an inch of your life!"

The Indian drew himself up to his full height at that.

"No hit Ogima Bush," he declared pompously. "Mister Smid Big Boss of camp; no boss of Ogima. Un-n-n-n, Smid no boss Ogima!"

"Well!" There was a wealth of biting sarcasm in the girl's tones. "Then who is Ogima's boss, pray?"

"Ogima's boss same boss as Big Boss—same boss as Mister Smid." The Indian was looking straight down into her eyes. His wicked black optics softened in a flash that transformed him, transfixed her with its intensity.

He placed his right hand over his left breast as he said it in tones scarcely above a sibilant whisper: "*Ogima's boss is J.C.X.*"

With another low bow, the Medicine Man whirled on a shoe-packed heel and strode swiftly away up the walk in the direction of the water-locked gate of the Cup of Nannabijou.

A few minutes later the girl heard the gong in the cliffs announce his departure.

CHAPTER XIX

"DEVIL HE MAY BE—BUT A MAN!"

I

WHEN Louis Hammond went away from the City Club after his conference with Norman T. Gildersleeve he was convinced of two things. The one was that Gildersleeve had not told him the entire truth. There had been a furtiveness about the demeanour of Gildersleeve that irritated Hammond: furthermore, there had been the acknowledged duplicity of Winch in passing himself off as a United States consul, not to mention Gildersleeve's veiled insinuations as to Josephine Stone's connection with the North Star. To Hammond's way of thinking, these and other elements of Gildersleeve's methods did not "hang" very well. The other conviction was that the North Star people had been cognizant of Gildersleeve's plans from the very first. There was now no doubt, in view of what had happened, that Acey Smith, the pulp camp superintendent, suspected, or perhaps knew definitely, from the night he landed that he, Hammond, was identified with Gildersleeve and had been sent out to the limits for the purpose of aiding in balking the North Star's plans. That being so, either Acey Smith had his own hidden objects in view in allowing Hammond the freedom of the camp, or else—well, Hammond rather scouted the idea that the Argus-eyed master of the Nannabijou Limits considered him a nonentity in this conflict of wits who wasn't worth troubling his head about. It couldn't be that, he surmised, because Smith

was not the type to overlook any possibilities of interference with his plans. The deeper motive that he might have had in view eluded Hammond's shrewdest deductions. Out in the woods Acey Smith was playing at his own game, and more experienced men than Hammond had failed to fathom him. Even those most closely associated with him admitted they never intimately understood this most inaccessible man of moods.

Anyway, Hammond felt immensely relieved to be free of all responsibility to either of the contending companies, and, having cashed Norman T. Gildersleeve's cheque in payment for his services next day, he began planning a certain little affair of his own.

He was unable to get passage out to the limits until noon, and the trip was made on a cranky, wheezing little gasoline tug manned by inexperienced seamen.

The tugmen's strike was on. Not only had all the North Star seamen left their boats, but they had taken out with them the crews of all the other towing and salvaging companies between the Soo and the Head of the Lakes. It was rumoured that the strike would next extend to the grain carriers and the passenger and freight boats plying up and down the Great Lakes.

The lumberjacks' unions, however, had not yet called their sympathetic strike. At the Nannabijou Limits Hammond found things much the same as when he had left, except that there seemed to be a large number of strange men prowling around the camp, who, though they wore bush garb, were patently not North Star men. At regular intervals, along the waterfront and the roads leading up into the woods, armed members of the Canadian Mounted Police were stationed, obviously for the protection of property in case violence followed.

The lumberjacks were plainly in a sullen mood, especially the foreigners, on whom the presence of the uni-

formed representatives of Canadian law and order produced an ugly irritation. But, under the iron rule of Acey Smith, weapons of any sort beyond the axes which the men used in their work were strictly forbidden, so that an armed outbreak was out of the question.

Hammond himself, on landing and producing his pass of identification, was requested to step over to a little group of police, where his pockets were lightly tapped to detect the possible presence of concealed weapons. "Sorry to put you to this bother, sir," smiled the officer in charge. "Just a matter of form, you know. Connected with the North Star Company, I suppose?"

"No," replied the young man. "I am here on private business of my own, but I expect to be in camp for a short time."

The officer gave him a sharp look as though committing his face to memory. He seemed about to ask another question, but instead nodded politely to signify the interview was over.

II

Sandy Macdougall was enjoying his afternoon nod when Hammond dropped in at their bunkhouse, but immediately after the latter's entry the cook rolled out of the blankets in his sock-feet. "Cripes, didn't I lock that door?" he gasped as he sat blinking at the newcomer. "Huh, guess I'm gettin' nerves, but the goings on here lately is enough to make a man *loco*."

"Why—what's up now, Sandy?" laughed Hammond.

"Place is alive with cut-throats," declared the other. "Fellow has to sleep with one eye open to watch that one of 'em don't come in to bean him for his wad."

"Yes, I saw a lot of strangers about the camp," observed Hammond. "Who are they anyway?"

"Gang of low-brow detectives and strike-breakers

brought in from Winnipeg and Duluth on a towed barge early this morning. They're the scum of creation, and the way they gave orders to my boys when they came in for eats—well, when Acey Smith comes back he'll have another strike on his hands. My outfit didn't hire on here to be bossed around by no second-class bums like them."

"So the North Star's putting up a bluff of breaking the strike?"

"North Star nothin'!" derided Sandy. "If it was I wouldn't feel so cussed mean toward them. This gang's been put in here by the other company—the Kam City Pulp and Paper Mill crowd—to take hold of the camp work if the North Star's pole-cutters and boom-tenders go out in sympathy with the tugmen. Mooney put me wise, and you bet we make 'em whack up for every meal they get here at rates just the same as if they was stoppin' at the Royal Aleck in Winnipeg."

Hammond whistled. "So that's the idea, eh?" He had to concede to himself that Gildersleeve must have acted with considerable despatch. No doubt he intended to use these men for waterfront land work when he got his tugs over from Duluth to convey the poles to Kam City.

"Oh, they ain't goin' to come very much, at that," insisted Macdougall. "Any old time this strike is settled it will be settled by the North Star itself—and it won't be settled till then, not if they bring all the strike-breakers and mounties between here and hell's gangway to the camp."

"So you think the North Star has the upper hand in this deal, Sandy?"

Macdougall fished out his black bottle and insisted on Hammond having a "nip" with him. "If they ain't got the upper hand right now," he replied, "they will have

it when the shuffle's over. There ain't any outsider can come in here and put it over Acey Smith. . . . And believe me, whatever is his game, I'm one who wants to see the Big Boss win. Here's to him!"

The deep underlying note in Sandy's tones made Hammond gaze at him fixedly. "You used to say, Sandy, that he was the king of crooks," he reminded. "You used to say, in fact, that Acey Smith was a devil in human form."

"Crook he may be and devil too," conceded the other. "But I'm with him because—" and Sandy smote a nearby bench with his fist,—“because he's a man! He's one of them kind of men that if the whole world was jumpin' at his throat he'd put his back again' a rock and fight it out without askin' help or sob-stuff from any of 'em. And he'd go down grinnin' that little devil-grin o' his and tellin' them all to go to hell and be damned to them—that's the kind of a man the Big Boss is!"

Hammond did not smile at this unexpected outburst of hero-worship. The little Scotch-Canadian was so emotionally intense about it.

"Listen, Hammond," he was saying. "The Big Boss likely is as black a rascal as they say he is, and that's a whole lot; but he never fights the weak or the poor. Ain't I seen what he's done unbeknownst to most for unfortunates in this camp? Ain't I been in the city when I seen him stop on the street to help a blind bum over a dangerous crossin' when everybody else was hustlin' by and lookin' the other way so they wouldn't see their duty? Don't I know that in the hard times six years ago it was this same Acey Smith who bought up a row of shacks in the coal docks district where the landlords was dumpin' whole families out because they had nothin' to pay them with, and don't I know that none of them has ever paid since when they was hard up? I know

because it was one of my side jobs to look after them houses and see that the taxes was paid.

"Yes, and I could tell you lots of other things about the Big Boss that would be just as hard to believe," the cook went on. "Suppose you never heard about the case of that Frompton girl?"

Other matters were uppermost in Hammond's mind, but he knew there was no stopping Sandy when the talking mood was on him, so he said good-naturedly: "No, Sandy, tell us the story."

III

"That all happened in the days before the war when the Big Boss was feelin' a lot more cocky than he seems to be nowadays," began the cook. "This Frompton girl, who was a waitress in one of the city eatin' houses, was something of a good looker, but it seems that down east she'd had a nasty bit of past, mostly some low skunk's fault who deceived her and skipped out leavin' her to face it alone. After her baby, maybe lucky for its poor little self, died, her and her mother came up to Kam City where nobody knew them. But scandal like that, especially if it's about a woman, will travel. One night a young blood, a son of one of the wealthy ginks in the town, being a little worse of bootleg, tried to get fresh with her, and the hot-tempered little thing hauls off and biffs him in the face. The poor prune wasn't man enough to take his medicine, but bawls her out with some dirty remark about what she'd been in the town she'd come from. I guess she got seein' red over that, for she picked up a catsup bottle and bashed him on the head with it. The rich man's son came near kickin' the bucket from that clout, and, as it was, he was a month or so in the hospital before they were sure he'd pull

through. They didn't pull the girl up for attackin' him, because his family didn't want the notoriety; but she was held in jail on a charge of disorderly conduct till they'd see what would happen to him. Then, if he lived, they intended to bring her before the magistrate and get her packed off to a reformatory as an example of what happens to bad girls who beat up rich men's sons.

"Well, I happened to know some of the crowd that was mixed up in the rumpus and had been followin' the case. One night when the Big Boss was in the dinin' camp havin' supper I threw down the paper and started to cuss.

"He looks over at me and asks: 'Why all the sweet language, Macdougall?'

"I starts in and tells him all about the case and how I thought the world was all wrong that nobody would lift a finger to help out a poor, fallen woman like this one. He listened with a lot more interest than you can generally get out of him, and I wound up by sayin', 'Cripes, what's all the preachers for that they don't start in scorin' the guilty parties instead of standin' by while everybody pans the girl?'

" 'The preachers ain't to blame, Sandy,' he comes back. 'Most of the preachers go as far as they dare in settin' the world right, and every once in awhile you read about some of the darin' ones being bumped out of their pulpits for speakin' their minds.' Then his face gets chalk-white like you see it when he's mad. 'It's this system they call Society needs fixin', Sandy,' he sneers. 'Society that just wants to use the law and the preachers to keep its chosen crowd out of jail in this world and out of hell in the next.'

"Think of him, the king of the big timber crooks, a-talkin' this way. But that was just like him—always contrary to everybody else.

"'Macdougall,' says he suddenly, 'don't you wish you was a great lawyer?'

"'Why?' I asks.

"'Because,' says he, 'you could defend this girl before the court and maybe cheat the thing they call the Law.'

"'I never thought of that,' I replied, but I could see there was something comin'.

"That little devil-grin flickers around the Big Boss's poker face that's always there when he's plannin' hellery. 'We ain't lawyers, Macdougall,' he states, 'but I know where the money can be found to hire the best sobstirrin' lawyer in Kam City, and if he gets her clear there'll be a bonus of a couple of hundred in it for him.'

"I knew what that meant. I had wished myself into the job of hirin' the lawyer and seein' that he got the money on the quiet. Acey Smith outlines how I am to go about the deal and says: 'If the lawyer gets her off, we'll see if we can't get a job for her.'

"To make a long story short we got Jacobs, the best lawyer on them sort of cases in Kam City, and he puts up such a talk for her, a-quotin' Scripture and so on, that he had everybody in the courtroom except the district crown attorney wipin' the corners of their eyes. He winds up by statin' there was a party who was prepared to start her off fresh on a decent job. The old magistrate was so taken with Jacob's speil he said he thought she hadn't had a chance, and, after a lecture to her on the straight and narrow path, he lets her off without even the suspended sentence the crown attorney tried to horn in with as a last resort.

"It was Jacobs turned the girl and her mother loose on me when they insisted on thanking the man who'd put up the money to defend her, and in a weak moment, bein' kind of flustered, I promised to take them to him. I'll never forget what happened when I took them out

to the old camp layout on the tug. As I said, the girl was rather a good-lookin' kid and she hadn't commenced to get that hard jib women who go under seem to take on. She seemed still kind of dazed over it all when I walked her and her mother into the superintendent's office. 'There's the man,' says I before I had yet thought just what I was doing. 'There's the man you can thank for savin' you from the clink.'

"The Big Boss he scowls at me as black as thunder and I knew I'd put my foot in it for fair, but the girl breaks down and falls at his feet, a-sobbin' that she wasn't worth savin'. In sort of hysterics she was. For once the Big Boss seemed like he didn't know what to do. He looked around wild-eyed as though he'd like to beat it out the door. But he couldn't, because in her little cryin' fit she'd taken a strangle hold on his boots. So he lifts her up and chucks her into her mother's arms.

"'Get up, girl,' he cries kind of hoarse and bashful-like. 'I ain't your judge, and if you've done any wrong I don't know anything about it and don't want to. The North Star's goin' to offer you a job, and Macdougall here has the lookin' after of that. Go straight, girl,' he adds, fixin' her with them flashin' coal-black eyes of his, 'and if any one throws this thing up at you again let us know about it and there'll be little old hell to pay!'

"Then he packs us back on the next tug with orders where she was to look for the job. It wasn't in a North Star office, but one of the other factories in town that people say is run with North Star money.

"But don't you think there wasn't a curtain-call for me when I got back to camp for givin' away to the girl and her mother as to the man whackin' up for her lawyer. The Big Boss nearly fired me.

"'You don't know me, Macdougall,' he grits. 'I ain't a movin' picture hero such as you seem to think. Didn't

I tell you we were in on this thing just for the fun of cheatin' the law? Besides, it wasn't my money but the North Star's that paid for her lawyer, and it was the North Star's influence that got her that job, just the same as the North Star has rescued other people from the clutches of the law that it knew it could use. That girl's one of us now and she'd go through hell-fire in the company's interests if she was asked to. If you wasn't blind you'd have seen that from the first. Beat it to your beanery and don't let me ever hear you mention a word about this again.'

"Aye, he's a queer, queer man, is Acey Smith," concluded the cook. "Sometimes it seems to me something is eatin' the heart out of him—something burnin' inside him and fillin' him up with hellery. Sometimes I think he's a good man with a devil in him that won't give him no rest."

The cook's story, like others he had heard, impressed Hammond even if it did increase the enigma that hung about the personality of the timber boss. "It is certain he has some fixed method in all this madness of his," Hammond mused as much to himself as to his companion. "One object undoubtedly is to keep every one guessing what his real motives are. He has to keep himself pretty much a mystery in order to carry out the orders of his bosses."

"Oh, but he ain't carryin' out their crooked work just for the money there's in it," spoke up Macdougall. "There's something deeper'n that. I've been a-studyin' the man too close and too long to believe that. It's something *inside* the man himself that makes him carry on as he does."

"I'll quite agree with you there," responded Hammond. "You call it a devil while I would call it an obsession of mind or a ruling mania: all of which are

pretty much the one and the same thing, except that our forefathers called it a devil and let it go at that. If one could only get the key to that obsession they'd soon be able to clear up the whole mystery of this camp."

"Aye, Hammond, if you *could* get the key," observed the cook, "but Acey Smith is canny enough to keep that key locked up in a dark place that nobody knows but him."

CHAPTER XX

PREPARING TO BEARD THE LION

I

“**T**O my mind,” continued the cook, “that same key has got something to do with them big booms of poles lyin’ out there in the bay waitin’ to be delivered to the Kam City Pulp and Paper Mills. Puttin’ one and two together I could see the drift of things so far as the strike is concerned if it wasn’t for all the queer side issues, includin’ that pretty girl that was stoppin’ out on Amethyst Island. What was the idea of her whiskin’ out of there the way she did?”

Hammond gasped. “Then—then she *has* left?”

“I thought you knew all about it.” Sandy Macdougall scrutinised his companion almost suspiciously.

“Honestly, Sandy, I’m in the dark. The last time I saw Miss Stone she said nothing about any plans for leaving in the near future.”

“Well, I’ll be jiggered! Why man, she left there the morning of the day you went to Kam City. She was supposed to have been carried off by a gang of Indians, and—”

“What’s that!” Hammond in his excitement leaped up seizing the other by the collar. “Are you joking, or is this the truth you’re telling me?”

“Hold your horses, hold your horses!” urged the cook. “I’m tellin’ you what was supposed to have happened—what the mounties claim they saw. You knew they had

arrested the Rev. Stubbs, the camp preacher, for takin' part in it, didn't you?"

"You're away off again, Sandy; they arrested him on a charge of vagrancy."

"Vagrancy my eye! That was only a charge to hold him on until they could get the goods on him for takin' part in the abduction of the girl, and I heard since that Stubbs got bail over in Kam City and jumped it. But I'm one that ain't takin' much stock in that abduction talk," continued the cook. "For one thing, the Big Boss and that girl was on friendly terms; in fact, he was the first one she came to see after she landed out here, and it's known he used to go out and see her on the island when you weren't busy takin' up her time." The cook grinned maliciously. "Don't you think it looks mighty odd that, knowin', as he must have knowed, that she was carried off like that, the Big Boss would leave for Montreal without botherin' his head about it? No, that ain't a bit like Acey Smith from what I know of him."

"Then you think—?"

"That the whole deal was a frame-up between her and the Big Boss to keep the Mounted Police busy on a false scent and to mystify everybody else that's tryin' to find out what the North Star's up to."

"I can't believe that!"

"Oh, you can't, eh? Well, have you got a better hunch? Bein' a bit soft on the girl maybe has made you short-sighted. Hold on, don't get mad; I don't blame you a bit, 'cause they tell me she's some lallapaluza for good looks. And I ain't meanin' to cast any reflections on her in this deal either. Only, I like you, Hammond, and I wanted to help you out with my hunch if it was any good to you, just in case some of the rest of them was puttin' something over on you."

Hammond for the moment was silent in the face of

these assertions. "But I can't for the life of me see," he mused presently, "how Rev. Stubbs was mixed up in it as you say."

"Search me." Sandy threw out his hands significantly. "For another thing, did you know that since the girl was supposed to be kidnapped and the Rev. Stubbs was arrested, his nibs, Ogima Bush the Medicine Man, has dropped out of sight too? He hasn't been seen anywhere inside or outside the camps."

"That might easily be," discounted Hammond. "The Medicine Man was always erratic in his comings and goings."

"And you don't think the girl was a party to the kidnapping' frame-up?"

"No, I certainly do not!" There came a warning glint into Hammond's eyes. "And I say that because I know Miss Stone would not willingly be a party to a crooked deal put up by Acey Smith or any one else."

"H'm, then what happened her and where is she now?"

"I've got a theory where she's been taken, and that's what I'm going to set about proving right away." Hammond rose and strode to the door. At the threshold he turned. "Sandy," he said, "I'm awfully much obliged to you for this little chat, and I think you've helped me a whole lot with the problem. In a couple of days' time I think I'll be able to get at the bottom of this whole mystery, or else—"

"Or else what?" insisted the cook.

"Or else I'm going to the mat with Acey Smith and choke the truth out of him!"

The cook rose to offer some better advice, but Hammond flung out the door and hurried down to the waterfront.

II

Hammond went direct to the tent occupied by Inspector Little, the officer in command of the Mounties. The Inspector was busy with one of the members of his force going over some papers.

"Sorry to trouble you, Inspector," opened Hammond, "but I'd like to make an appointment to meet you privately on a confidential matter."

The inspector turned the papers he was examining face downwards on the little camp table and looked up. "If it is an important matter," he suggested crisply, "we may as well deal with it at once."

"It is quite important," Hammond assured him.

Inspector Little turned to his aide. "You may go, Sergeant," he indicated.

Alone with the officer, Hammond briefly explained that he was a personal friend of the young lady, Miss Josephine Stone, who had been carried away by force from Amethyst Island, and he had come to offer his services in helping to locate her. He added that he had a theory where she could be found and was ready to start on an expedition by himself to locate her once he had gained the necessary permission of the police. He briefly referred to the arrest of Rev. Nathan Stubbs and the rumour that he was suspected of being a party to the abduction. He said nothing, however, about his knowledge that the fake preacher was really a detective in the employ of Norman T. Gildersleeve, fearing such a statement would lead him into complications that would only delay the expedition he had in mind. He did express the opinion that the camp preacher could have had no part in the abduction.

The inspector stared at him fixedly. "What particular

grounds have you for that last statement, Mr. Hammond?" he asked.

"Well, for one thing he was down here at the dock at noon when I left that day. I scarcely see how he could have got back here so soon."

"That was Stubbs' own contention when we quizzed him about it. So we arrested him on a nominal charge of vagrancy to hold him on suspicion of being implicated in the abduction. In the first place," argued the officer, "if he were innocent, why should he jump one thousand dollars bail put up by his lawyer through mysterious friends? With much less than a thousand dollars he could have cleared himself of the vagrancy charge."

Hammond knew the very important reason Norman T. Gildersleeve had for getting the pseudo preacher out of the awkward position his continued incarceration would have brought about, but he cautiously held silence on that point.

"We had, as a matter of fact, very good grounds for suspecting Stubbs of not only being implicated but of being the ring-leader in the abduction of the young lady," Inspector Little continued.

"Then he was actually seen taking part in the abduction?"

"Disguised, yes," enlightened the inspector. "There has been something altogether queer going on in these camps for some time as you likely know from your own experiences, and I have no doubt the carrying off of Miss Stone is but a side issue of some intrigue on foot between these rival lumbermen. One or the other of the companies concerned must have put up Stubbs' bail.

"However, I have to admit that suspicion first fell upon the camp preacher through some chance remarks on the part of Mr. A. C. Smith, the superintendent, on

the very morning the affair took place. Mr. Smith came down to my tent early to ask me to go up and have breakfast with him and to inquire if there were anything he or any of his men could do to help us out in getting settled. A mighty charming and interesting chap that man Smith for all his enemies say about him, and he has at least shown us every courtesy since we've been here.

"Well, when we were just about to leave for the dining camp he whirled and asked me a remarkable question. 'Did you ever know of one man successfully impersonating two different characters in life, Inspector Little?' He put it with that odd little smile of his—a sort of whimsical grin that makes you think he's reading your answer before you utter it.

"'Well,' I answered in a spirit of banter, 'there was Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, for instance, and I've known certain actors on the stage who did it pretty smartly.'

"'But he seemed to be serious about it. 'I have reason to suspect such a dual rôle is being played in real life on these limits,' he said. Then he asked: 'Did you closely observe that camp preacher, Rev. Nathan Stubbs, who was down around the docks here a little while ago?'

"'I did,' I answered, for it is part of our business to take sharp note of all strange characters.

"'And you looked over the Indian Medicine Man they call Ogima Bush who was around here when you were putting up your tents late yesterday afternoon?'

"I told him I had, wondering all the time what he was coming to. Then he asked me if I had noted a peculiarity about both their eyes; that, while the Indian had two little wounds either painted or gashed under his, the camp preacher had talcum or some other powder thickly spread over what seemed to be tiny scars in the same places on his face.

“‘By Jove,’ I answered, ‘now that you mention it, I have noticed that, and though their clothing, colour of skin and get-up is different, they are about the one height and build.’

“‘And they are both mysteries,’ he supplemented.

“‘Harmless fakirs, though?’ I hazarded.

“‘If they were,’ he replied briskly, ‘or rather if I were sure they were, I wouldn’t take up your time about the matter. I am convinced, Inspector, that they are both *very dangerous characters*.’

“His tone of conviction impressed me. ‘And you feel certain it is one man playing two rôles?’ I insisted.

“‘Oh, I’m not saying that,’ he replied. ‘But the fact that you have noted the same facial peculiarity in those two characters gives me an idea which is further strengthened by the circumstance that no one has seen the two of them about any part of the camps at the same time.’

“I thereupon suggested that if he, as superintendent of the camps, requested it we could arrest the party on a charge of vagrancy while he was playing either rôle and thus get at the bottom of the thing. But, on the other hand, I added, I would much favour keeping a close watch on the actions of both Ogima Bush and Rev. Nathan Stubbs until such time as there appeared to be more definite grounds for making an arrest.

“‘That would be much the better plan, Inspector,’ he approved. ‘As I am going away from camp for a few days I thought I would at least draw your attention to the circumstances, and, in case there might be some mischief afoot behind this apparent masquerading, you could be on the lookout for it.’

“I thanked him and the subject was not again mentioned during our conversation. That very morning, and it must have been a short time after our talk, Miss

Stone was forcibly carried off by a band of Indians headed by the Medicine Man."

Hammond sat bolt upright at this information, but he suppressed comment while the inspector proceeded.

III

"It was not until the patrol down at Amethyst Island waterfront had exhausted every effort to run down the abductors of the young lady and failed that they sent in a report to us. The result was that we didn't hear of it until after dinner. The preacher was in the camp, seemingly quite confident that his disguise was impenetrable. His surprise when the handcuffs were slipped onto him was good enough to be genuine. Sure enough though when a handkerchief was applied to the paste and talc powder on his cheek bones it disclosed two tiny white scars under either eye in the self-same spots where the Indian had the red gashes, not to mention the false beard which we left on his face for the time being."

Hammond sat dumbfounded at this recital. Those tiny white scars under each eye! Gildersleeve was the only white man he had ever seen with such peculiar marks. So—so Gildersleeve had really played the part of the camp preacher himself? That much was patent now, and there seemed every circumstantial incident to imply that he was also Ogima Bush, though Hammond could scarcely conceive that any make-up could transform a white man into such a thorough-going savage.

"The rest of the story is likely familiar to you, Mr. Hammond," the inspector was proceeding. "You know how Stubbs was arraigned in Kam City on a charge of vagrancy, bailed out by friends and immediately disappeared. It is all a mighty queer mix-up that stands in need of thorough investigation, but," with a wave of

the hand and a raising of the brows, "the Mounted force were sent out here to protect property and maintain law and order in case of a strike, and without a shadow of a clue to work on it's pretty difficult getting on the trail of the principals behind the outrage on Amethyst Island. Now, if you have any additional facts that would be of use to us, or can give us tangible help of any sort in locating Miss Stone, we will certainly be glad to avail ourselves of your assistance."

Hammond was incensed at the evident duplicity of Gildersleeve. But at the same time he was tired of theorising, and of attempting to unravel the puzzles which Nannabijou Camp confronted him with almost daily since he had first arrived there. So he thrust aside the temptation to enlighten the head of the Mounties on what he knew of the part Gildersleeve must have played.

"I told you I had a theory as to where Miss Stone has been carried off," he reminded the inspector. "As a matter of fact, I am certain she has been taken up into a hiding-place in the Cup of Nannabijou."

"What—up above those cliffs on the hill? Why, man, our chaps say there's no opening in that wall of cliffs and they are unscalable."

"They are popularly believed to be so," replied Hammond, "but it is a fact that there are parties who make a headquarters of some sort up there, and they have a secret entrance."

"Well!" The inspector pursed his moustached mouth in polite skepticism. "You know how they get in and out?"

"Not for certain, but I do know a better and a quicker method."

"Yes?"

"The air route."

"H'mph." The inspector evinced a sudden interest.

"Yes, that *would* be practical for scouring the whole country back of here. But where are you going to get an airplane and an airman?"

"There's an old scouting single-seater in Kam City in fairly good shape. I happened to see it in the armouries while I was rambling around the city a couple of days before I first came out here. It's the property of the government. That's why I came to you; as head of the Mounted Police you could no doubt induce the government authorities to lend us the machine for this purpose."

"But your airman?"

For answer Hammond threw back the lapel of his coat displaying the airman's wings which he modestly wore over his left vest-pocket. "I can take care of that part of it," he suggested. "I saw three years' hard work in the air overseas, two years of which I put in playing tag with Fritz."

"Good enough!" Proof that Hammond had been a fighting airman seemed to dissipate the inspector's last doubt.

"There'll be no harm in giving this thing a try," he decided, "and by Jove, we'll get busy right off. We'll send you over to Kam City in one of the police motor-boats to-morrow morning. I'll give you a wire to file to Major Lynn at Ottawa, and he'll get things through for us without unnecessary red tape. But look you, Hammond, when you go up to the Cup you have only instructions to look around, get the lay of the land and come right back here to me. Then we'll act!"

The inspector glanced at his watch. "Now, by the way," he suggested, "I've some confounded routine to look after that will keep me busy for the best part of a couple of hours. But after tea drop in for an hour or

so, old chap, and we'll have a pipe and talk over the details of this thing."

Hammond went away highly elated. At last he was to get a real chance to do some active work in ferreting out the mystery of the Nannabijou Limits, and—he fervently hoped—to meet again Josephine Stone, the girl with the high-arched eyebrows, and the woman of his dreams.

CHAPTER XXI

A VIPER BITES AT A FILE

I

THERE was unwonted stir in the Montreal head offices of the Regal Bank of Canada. Rarely in the metropolitan headquarters of the Dominion's greatest financial institution, where the comings and goings of important personages are almost hourly occurrences, did the entrance of a visitor draw more than a hurried glance from the workers behind the polished mahogany and lacquered brass. The man who had just come through the great double doors was no ordinary type.

He seemed like a being detached from his fellows; like them but not of them, indifferent, masterful. Tall and of superb build, his close-fitting dark clothes and light fedora accentuated the pallor of his coldly-chiselled aquiline features and the blackness of his extraordinary eyes. His every item of dress—his tie with the tiny, scintillating white diamond pin, his white cuffs just peeping from the sleeves, his shoes—had a distinctive correctness. But his carriage was of the easy, confident grace of one more used to the wide spaces of the North than the over-heated drawing-rooms of the East. He evidently scorned a walking-stick, for in his long, capable-looking hands he carried only his gloves and a black travelling-bag.

Young women clerks glanced up from their tasks to stare pensively at the stranger. Young men bit enviously at their nether lips as they mentally conceded the

physical perfection of the visitor. There were whispered *asides*. It seemed he was not altogether unknown among the older members of the staff.

The newcomer went direct to the quarters of the bank's president. In the outer office the president's secretary rose deferentially and opened the door to the inner sanctum. "Sir David will see you at once, Mr. Smith," he announced.

A lean grey man with alert grey eyes and a drooping grey moustache arose and proffered his hand across the glass-topped desk. "We received your wire and were expecting you, Mr. Smith."

"I was glad to find you were not out of town, Sir David," returned the other, "for the matter I wish to see you about is rather pressing and important."

"When you favour us with one of your rare personal calls it usually is so," smilingly reminded the banker.

"This time, nevertheless," insisted Acey Smith, "it may prove more than an ordinary surprise for you."

And an hour and a half later when Sir David Edwards-Jones, president of the Regal Bank of Canada, had gone over the papers and documents in the black grip with Acey Smith and their business interview was ended, the perplexity that sat upon his usually imperturbable features was proof of the other's prediction.

"Your wishes shall be carried out to the letter, Mr. Smith," he promised. "The legality of the transaction cannot be questioned. Your financial stewardship of the affairs of the other party has been scrupulously above any criticism and we nor any other concerned have any option but to be guided by your commands."

"I confess," he added with a puzzled smile, "that the methods of your company have always baffled me; this time, however, I cannot for the life of me see what is behind the North Star's strategy."

"This time," enlightened Acey Smith as he bade Sir David good-bye, "there is no strategy behind the North Star's methods."

Acey Smith had barely left the president's office when a stout, florid-faced man who had been waiting outside was ushered in.

"By the way, Sir David," he asked closing the door, "who is that extraordinary looking chap who just left this office?"

"Who is he?" echoed Sir David Edwards-Jones rather abstractedly. "He's a lumberman from the Northwest. But, Dennison, he is also one of the most remarkable, most inscrutable men in the whole Dominion of Canada."

Which statement, vague as it was, contained as much information as can usually be drawn from great bankers relative to their customers.

II

On the afternoon of the memorable Monday, October 16, one week previous to the date at which the Kam City Pulp and Paper Mills was under agreement with the government to be in full operation manufacturing newsprint from the pulpwood boomed at Nannabijou Limits or lose their cutting rights on the North Shore, Norman T. Gildersleeve, president of the International Investment Corporation, parent of the Kam City Company, was pacing the docks at the limits and cursing the haste that had brought him out to such a monotonous place a day before it was necessary.

The tugs which he had wired for from Duluth would not now likely reach the limits until the following day, and, with all the indications of rough weather that were apparent, they might be later still. As a matter of fact—and Gildersleeve was quite cognizant of that fact—

the United States tugs dare not touch a pole in the booms without the North Star's permission until such time as Ontario government authority intervened in the strike and approved of the use of the foreign tugs as an emergency. But Gildersleeve considered himself a master of the gambler's game of bluff. He had taken every means of stimulating quick government action by means of what he called "hot grounders" over the wires to the premier and members of his cabinet in Toronto. The presence of the fleet of American tugs, ready to pitch into the work of transporting the poles, he calculated, would take the heart out of the North Star Company. If it didn't—well, he'd have those tugs in readiness and he'd sue the North Star for the expense of bringing them over.

Whatever his reflections on the matter may have been on that windy afternoon, his pacing suddenly came to an abrupt stop as he caught, out of the corner of an eye, a dark object rising and falling in the seas to the west. He peered fixedly as it topped the next wave. Sure enough, it was a tug—but it was not coming from the direction of Duluth.

Others came running down to the docks from divers directions to gaze upon it with excited comment and conjecture. There had not been a tug at the dock in days; not since the strike had been called.

The great craft lifted valiantly against the flailing seas until its plume, its stack and the dark hulk of its high forward freeboard were plainly discernible. It whistled with what seemed a jubilant note before it rounded into the gap of the bay.

Gildersleeve started in pure amazement. On its smoke-stack and in the centre of the sinister little blue-black flag at its bow were the fiery-red, five-pointed stars that designated the North Star fleet.

"The strike is over!"

It went up a yell from the rabble on the docks. It was answered with a shout from the men crowded on the bow of the tug. Lumberjacks came pouring down from the camp and the woods everywhere. There was the electric tension in the air that obtains when man-packs sense that magic monster known as News.

The crowd yelled and the tug's siren screamed.

"Hurr-r-rah for the Big Boss—he settled it!"

"Hurr-r-rah for A-c-e-y Smith!"

And with the slogan went up a shout that shook the woods. Bucksaw men, axe men and river men danced ridiculous capers on the landing, jostling against each other and firing their woollen caps high in air. It was an ovation such as the demagogue, Slack, would have pawned his soul for—a tribute from pent up spirits who, in their hearts of hearts, had steadfastly believed when the worst came to the worst the Big Boss would range himself on the side of his men. So much for what they call personal magnetism.

The excitement died down somewhat when it was discovered that the master of the Nannabijou camps was not on board. Had he been, his first utterance no doubt would have been to pass the honours for settling the strike to Hon. J. J. Slack, M.P., president of the North Star.

In the crowd leaving the tug's gang-plank Gilder-sleeve glimpsed the short, corpulent figure of Artemus Duff, president of the Kam City Pulp and Paper Mills, hurrying toward him. Duff looked a bit mussed up from the trip over, but his round, fat face was beaming.

III

Duff came forward and grasped the extended hand of Gildersleeve. "Thought I'd run over and be first to break the good news to you, Norman," he puffed. "The North Star gang had to come to their oats."

"So I see," observed Gildersleeve. "Did you get any of the inside particulars, Duff?"

"No, not a great deal. Slack made the announcement to the tugmen that the company would meet their demands if they would immediately return to their boats, and followed up with a windy speech about his own efforts in their behalf. Guess he received his orders from the big fellows that own him body and soul."

"They saw at last that their cake was dough," commented Gildersleeve quietly. "They could not have held out much longer with their obvious trickery, for tomorrow would have seen a fiat issued from the attorney-general's department enjoining the North Star to make immediate settlement of the strike and delivery of the poles. Oh, by the way, Duff, did you think to wire Duluth cancelling the order for those tugs?"

"Winch looked after that," informed the other.

"Good. I only hope the wire arrived before the fleet set out. Gad, Duff, this was a master stroke of ours," he spoke up emphatically. "I've nailed the North Star's hide on the door inside out. It's the beginning of the end for that iniquitous gang of commercial cut-throats. Few people realise that the culmination of this strike and the subsequent delivery of those poles in the bay yonder writes the final chapter in dark history that goes back to the beginning of things on this North Shore. Once our mills at Kam City are in full operation, with sufficient poles piled in the yards to keep them running six months, we will have completed our covenant with the

government. Then watch me crush the North Star and all its brazen subsidiaries!"

Gildersleeve paused in his pacing, proffered Duff a cigar and lit one himself. He struck a Napoleonic attitude as he swept his arm from south to north. "All this North Shore and its great potential wealth will soon again be under my absolute domination," he predicted. "With this limits and the mills we will soon reduce the North Star's power and prestige to a point where they will be glad to surrender their lake fleet and equipment for their price as junk. Their costly mill without machinery will help to sink them and sink them fast. Nothing now can prevent our complete victory."

Duff rolled his unlighted cigar to the other side of his mouth and chuckled effusively. "They let their men go out on strike just a few days too soon to catch us un-awares," he commented sagely.

"Their strike was a joke," sneered the president of the International Investment Corporation. "There isn't a doubt now that they precipitated it with a view to keeping every tug tied up until after our contract time for having the mills running. The rest of their plot was obvious: Once the government had nullified our coming rights on these limits the North Star would come into re-possession of them automatically. Then, with no raw product to draw from, we would have been forced to sell our mill equipment to them at their own price and our mill building would remain a vast white elephant. We slipped a big one over on them when I put through the deal that took away the machinery they had on order. That's why they were so keen on getting us into a corner where we'd have to let them have that same machinery for a song. The North Star's middle name is Revenge—and now they are going to get their bellyful of it."

"And this strike was the trump card they kept hidden up their sleeve all summer," amended Duff.

"Sure it was. But it was a mighty crude piece of work, and I wouldn't be surprised if your oily friend, J. J. Slack, loses his high-salaried job over the head of it." Gildersleeve smiled grimly at the prospect. "You see, the North Star evidently figured on a long-drawn arbitration that would keep the strike hanging fire until the time was up for delivery of the poles. They were depending on Slack's prestige in politics being powerful enough to prevent the provincial authorities from forcing the issue. It was all a dismal failure, and I'd give much to see the Honourable Slack's face one week from to-day when the Kam City Pulp and Paper Mills has its official opening with members of the provincial cabinet present as our official guests."

A perplexed shadow crossed Duff's face. "Come to think of it, Slack didn't seem much upset about it this afternoon," he suggested dubiously. "In fact, he really acted as though the North Star had gained a victory instead of us."

"Slack's shallow brain doesn't fully comprehend what it all means," waived Gildersleeve. "All he sees is the peanut politics—the prestige the settlement of the strike will give him with the labour vote. It is A. C. Smith, superintendent of these camps, and the only member of the North Star executive in personal touch with the outfit who finance the company, who will give him an uncomfortable hour over the clumsy failure that's been made of this piece of trickery. Smith's the slippery eel of this concern I intend to land in the net once we've turned the North Star inside out. Once we've got the upper hand on the North Shore *we* will wield the political whip with a commission of inquiry that will expose the North Star and force them to a show-down."

"Be careful," cautioned Duff looking furtively behind him along the dock. "One can't tell around here—"

"Shucks, man, there's nothing to fear now; I've trimmed the claws of the North Star and they're powerless even if they did know the hand we're about to play." Gildersleeve lowered his voice: "Right now I've got a man ferreting out their secret layout up in the hills over there. But I'll tell you about that after we go up to our shack. Come let's go over and drop in on Inspector Little."

Reference to the settlement of the strike, to the surprise of Gildersleeve and Duff, brought no elation into the face of the police inspector. He merely continued to drum lightly on the little table with a bit of amethyst rock he was using as a paper weight. When he spoke his brows were puckered and he kept his eyes centred on the table. "I'm not at all satisfied with things," he complained. "We are out here to do our duty as we find it, but"—and he looked straight up into the eyes of Gildersleeve when he said it—"but I've a bit of a hunch that one or the other of the two companies interested in the operations on these limits is not playing square with us."

Gildersleeve started. "Just what do you mean, Inspector?" he demanded.

"I mean that underhand work has been going on here since the day we arrived and that it could not continue as it has without the cognizance and backing of some one in authority."

"It was at our instigation the police were brought out here," insisted Gildersleeve. "It's scarcely likely we would ask you to guard the property we are interested in and then set about deliberately double-crossing you."

"No." Colourlessly. "But you were not the first to

ask for police protection. A day before your request went in President Slack, of the North Star Company, wired to Ottawa for Mounted Police protection at the limits in case the strike materialised. Both companies seemed intensely anxious to have our assistance; that's why subsequent events rather puzzle me."

"What subsequent events in particular do you refer to, Inspector?"

"Well, to begin with there was the abduction of that young lady living on Amethyst Island, the arrest of the fake camp preacher, Nathan Stubbs, and the latter's jumping his bail and disappearance. Now, some one with plenty of funds was interested enough to forfeit one thousand dollars in order to get Stubbs out of the clutches of the law. Mind you, I'm not saying it was either of the companies, but it was some party vitally interested in what is going on out here, and one or the other of the companies must know who."

Duff shuffled and coughed and took a fresh tooth-hold on his mangled dead cigar. Gildersleeve's face remained a complete mask. "I'm sure we haven't the slightest idea," he observed with guileless indifference.

"*Some one* undoubtedly has," emphasised the inspector. "Furthermore, Stubbs must be quite confident of his backing, else he wouldn't have the nerve to return to the limits in broad daylight."

Gildersleeve almost jumped to his feet at that. "Stubbs back here," he cried. "Impossible!"

"He was seen less than an hour ago back in the hills by some of our men out looking for the missing girl."

Gildersleeve gave the inspector a glance that questioned his sanity. It was Duff who spoke first. "Did they get him?" he breathed.

"No, he disappeared in the bush as silently and completely as a timber wolf." The inspector bent his eyes

searchingly on Gildersleeve. "He was playing the *other* rôle this time."

"The other rôle?" The puzzled look on Gildersleeve's face looked almost genuine to the police officer.

"Yes, that of Ogima Bush, the Medicine Man—the same disguise he wore the morning he and his gang abducted Miss Stone."

"That's all wrong—all pure piffle!" exploded Gildersleeve.

"Why do you say that?" Quietly.

"Because—because, damn it, man, that camp preacher could never have played the rôle of the Medicine Man."

"They are one and the same man."

"They are not, I tell you!"

The police inspector leaned forward, his eyes fixing those of the financier like steely points of light. "If you can furnish proof of that statement, Mr. Gildersleeve," he said at last, "it would be very useful information for the police."

Gildersleeve tightened up in a hurry. "Oh, I have nothing in the way of proof," he laughed easily. "It was merely a conviction."

"There's a vast difference," coldly observed Inspector Little. "A vast difference, Mr. Gildersleeve. Nevertheless, your assertion provides the germ of a new theory."

He did not add as the pulp mill men were leaving his tent that that same new theory presented a worse tangle than the old one.

"Stubbs the camp preacher had two enamelled patches covered with talc powder under his eyes; Ogima Bush the Medicine Man has two red gashes under his and this man Gildersleeve has two tiny white scars in the same places." Those observations kept recurring stubbornly in the inspector's mind. "I wonder," he mused, "if this part of the North Shore isn't really under a hoo-doo as

the Indians say it is—or, am *I* getting old and losing my grip?”

IV

Gildersleeve cautiously refrained from uttering what was on his mind as he and Duff wended their way up to their quarters in one of the smaller log shacks the former had rented during his stay on the limits.

At the door, Gildersleeve paused to scan the lake and the sky. “Gad, it looks as though we are in for some bad weather, Duff,” he observed ominously.

“You kin bank on that, Mister,” offered a grizzled lumberjack who stopped in passing. “Win’s been a-blowin’ outen one spot all day—an’ when the win’ don’t follow the sun round on ol’ Lake Supe’ you kin look out fer high-jinks in the weather line afore monin’.”

CHAPTER XXII

THE NIGHT OF THE TEMPEST

I

THE sun went down that evening on a weird northern world. The wind, which had been pressing out of the east all day, had dropped as at some elemental sunset signal; but the great lake, lashed to fury, raced by windrow upon windrow of long, curling "shanty" waves—the terrible seas for which Superior in its wrath is peculiar. Three "mock suns" stood in vertical alignment above the declining orb of day, and the air was filled with a ghostly, brassy light that tinted the wild hills, the forests and the raging sea with its exotic saffron glow.

Nannabijou camp, aglare in the unreal light, its windows flashing like blood-red jewels, stood out against the setting of the sombre mountain ranges like a fantastic painting on the canvas of some mad master. Above the southeastern horizon hung a lowering blackness that presaged the hurricane to come, while up from a hundred lonely bays along the rocky North Shore the flailing waves sent up a thunderous, pounding roar.

From a plateau on Nannabijou Mountain above the beaver dam lake on Solomon Creek, a figure that seemed the *genius loci* of the fearsome night looked out upon these things. His was a face of evil cunning, dusky almost to blackness except where two red gashes stood out under the black eyes—eyes which alone of all his sinister countenance seemed alive and human. He wore no cov-

ering over his long straight black hair save a band of purple which held in place a single eagle's feather at the back of his head. Round his neck were hung many strings of glistening wolves' teeth.

Behind the Indian magician were ranged four headmen of the Objibiways, as motionless as he, faces to the setting sun.

For moments they stood thus like statues of bronze, until a lake gull, wheeling with a shrill scream inland, swooped close to their heads. The Medicine Man turned, his gaze sweeping Nannabijou Bay where the great booms of poles lay secure from the assaults of the seas, took in the waterfront where the patrols of police paced back and forward, and travelled to the blackness of the coming storm.

Suddenly he raised his arms aloft and his lips gave utterance to a strange, guttural incantation in which his companions joined—a lugubrious sing-song in the Objibiway tongue. It ended with a leaping, whirling sort of dance. The witch doctor flung out a hand and from it there flew a short cylindrical object that sang through the air like a spent bullet and dropped with a soft "plop" far out in the little lake.

In that cylinder was wrapped the Great Medicine of the North—a charm which once used, the pagan tribes believe, insures the success of any project no matter how beset with difficulties and dangers.

At a low grunting command from the Medicine Man the Indians turned and silently melted into the murk of the forest. And, as they did so, there swept up from the woods a long-drawn, frightful cry that carried far and wide above the surf roar from below.

It was not the call of a timber wolf nor of other beast of the wilderness. In its swiftly rising and falling ca-

dences it was half laughter, half wail; a curious and awesome blending of mockery and lamentations.

The rim of the setting sun flicked out in the gash of the western cloud-banks and starless night dropped over the troubled waters and the sighing woods.

II

The tempest broke over Nannabijou camp in shrieking fury between seven and eight o'clock out of a night of stygian blackness. It came a great gust that screamed and skirled overhead like legions of the damned on a terrestrial rampage. Tents of the Mounties along the waterfront were overthrown by the first blast and pressed flat as before the smash of a giant's hand. Great trees were bent and twisted until they turned over at the roots or broke at the base like matches.

The rain was flung down with the wind in great drenching splashes that beat through crevices of the windows and doors of the camp buildings in hissing jets of spray. Every path and roadway into the hills was transformed into a miniature torrent racing down to the bay.

It was a night such as mocks the courage of the stout-hearted and sends the wonder-fright of children into the beings of men. Every living thing in the camp scuttled to the most convenient shelter, except the patrolling policemen, who maintained their beats like fantastic wraiths of the storm the while their searchlights played feebly into the murk and downpour over the field of pulpwood booms in the bay.

Secure in a stout log cabin, Norman T. Gildersleeve and Artemus Duff sat by a roaring fire in a sheet-iron Queen heater. Duff, twisting his inevitable dead cigar from corner to corner of his mouth, was obviously trying to conceal the nervousness that was upon him. At each

succeeding blast of the storm, which seemed to swoop down upon the cabin like a demon bent on pressing it into the face of the earth, and at the intermittent crash of falling timber, he would half start from his chair, his fat cheeks blanching with terror and his chubby knees quaking. Gildersleeve, whose early life had inured him to the savage moods of the North, sat silent, imperturbable, as though engrossed with some irrelevant problem.

Suddenly the millionaire, like one awaking from a doze, straightened in his chair and lit a fresh cigar. "Gad, what a night, Duff," he mused. "What a hell of a night." He glanced at his watch. "I wonder what in blazes has become of my man, Lynch?"

"If he's up there—in this—" Duff waved excitedly in the direction of the hills. "If he's up there—he's likely got his—by now."

"The confounded idiot!" stormed Gildersleeve with unfeeling heat. "He ought to have had sense enough to get out of the timber when he saw what was coming. Even a child would know enough to do that."

"Maybe when he saw it coming he decided to stay in some safe place until it was over."

"No—not Lynch. He's scared plain stiff of the bush at night. For a detective who's done dirty, risky jobs all over the country he's the veriest coward in the woods after nightfall. He'd sneak into a king's bed chamber and steal his private papers for a ten-dollar bill, but he wouldn't go into the big timber after sun-down for a million."

"Then—what do you think—could have happened to him?" Duff was glad of any diversion, gruesome or otherwise, that might take his thoughts off the raging of the storm outside.

"It's hard to say, Duff." Gildersleeve got up and paced the floor. "He must have met with some accident;

twisted an ankle in the windfalls, fallen over a cliff, or else—well, it's hard to say—”

He stopped in his tracks as a scraping thud resounded at the cabin door.

Duff lurched to his feet as the door sprang open and the bedraggled figure of a man thrust itself across the threshold accompanied by a welter of flying rain that spattered across the floor to the wall beyond.

“Lynch!” gasped Gildersleeve.

“That’s me—least—what’s left—of me,” asserted the newcomer between panting gasps as he crowded the door shut.

He was a wiry-looking little man with a face like a rat; beady eyes back of an insignificant nose, high upper lip and receding chin. He immediately proceeded to divest himself of his reefer and boots and stood up a-drip and steaming by the sheet-iron stove.

“That’s right, Lynch,” approved Gildersleeve, “let your clothes dry on you, and you won’t catch cold. Here, have a bolt of Scotch.” He poured out a stout bracer from a silver pocket-flask into a metal cup and handed it to Lynch who downed it neat at a gulp, his beady eyes glittering. “There,” said Gildersleeve, “that’ll make a new man of you, Lynch. How is it you didn’t strike out for camp before it got dark and the storm came up?”

“Got lost,” explained Lynch. “Didn’t notice it was getting late until it was near sun-down. Tried to make a short cut through the bush to the creek and lost my bearings in that rotten mess. Couldn’t see the sun or a blessed thing to guide me out. Struggled in all kinds of circles through windfalls breast-high and every time I’d stop for breath I’d hear sneaking sounds all round me like things watching for me to fall so they could jump me while I was down.

“Then—then—I heard a horrible yell. No, it wasn’t

a yell either; it was like wailing and laughing all mixed up. It made my blood run cold. I can hear it yet.

"Ugh!" He shuddered. "I don't know which was the worst—floundering round in the windfalls or coming down the trail in the hurricane with deadfalls smashing down in the wind everywhere. I nearly got mine with falling timber a dozen times, and every ten steps or so I'd go flying on my face in the muck. I wouldn't go through it again for a hundred thousand."

III

"But you're safe—it's all over now," reminded Gildersleeve handing the detective a cigar. "The question is did you find out anything worth while?"

"I found out something that ought to be worth a whole lot."

"Good!" urged Gildersleeve. "I told you there was a fifty-dollar bonus in it if you got a line on the North Star's secret layout and their wireless plant up there. That promise holds."

"I don't know what's up in that devilish place," remarked Lynch, "but I did find out how they get in and out of the Cup of Nannabijou."

"What!" Both Gildersleeve and Duff were tense.

"It's a creek-bed that dries up when you touch a button."

His companions stared blankly as though he had suddenly gone crazy.

"S'help me," insisted Lynch, "that's just what it is. I found it out by pure accident. Was poking around in a sort of tunnel that opens out on the rapids of the creek when my foot caught in something, and, in trying to stop myself from falling, I swung up a hand against a piece of rock jutting from the wall. In my business

I keep my fingers as sensitive as a combination lock expert. I guess if it hadn't been for that I wouldn't have felt that little round hole in the rock. I got out my pocket-flash and examined it. It was only about the size of a nail, drilled into the rock about an inch and a half. I could see then that that knob of rock had been cleverly cemented into a hole in the wall. 'Aha,' thinks I, 'this is a spring that opens some secret entrance through the rock.' I wasn't at all expecting what it really turned out to be. So I gets a match, inserts it in the hole and presses down on it just to see what would happen.

"There was a flash like lightning, and a queer, soft sound like a gong came from up above somewhere. Then in a minute it seemed to me the creek rapids just down the tunnel got awful quiet.

"I went down to investigate, and sure enough there was no water running down, and if it hadn't been for the wet at the bottom and sides of the channel I wouldn't have believed there ever had been. I slipped back and pressed the match against the concealed button again. The bell rang and almost right away the water came roaring down like it was before. Now I think that was pretty good scouting for one day."

"You didn't try going up the creek bottom to see where it led to," Gildersleeve pressed him.

"Not much. I up and beat it. Something mighty queer about it all that sort of got my goat, and besides I was scared that bell ringing would bring some one round that might use me rough. I didn't know it had got so late until I was out in the daylight again."

"So that's it," mused Gildersleeve, "that's how they get up into the Cup. Well, to-morrow we'll—" He strode over and stood staring at the circular draft-vent of the little stove.

What he might have said was left unfinished for there

came a great crash above the howlings of the storm that made the earth shudder. It was followed by a continuous pounding thunder that grew louder and louder as though the tops had slid from the mountains and were crashing down to the lake. Nearer and more formidable it grew, setting the building a-quiver at each succeeding smash until it seemed to sweep into and through the very heart of the camp.

The three men stood speechless and aghast, staring into each other's terror-smitten countenances.

IV

Gildersleeve was the first to move. With an inarticulate cry he flung open the door and leaped into the night.

Outside all was pandemonium. With the advent of the new terror the storm had subsided considerably, though rain was still pouring down. Men awakened from their sleep were rushing everywhere through the wet and darkness. There were hysterical shouts and coarse, ugly curses. In another moment scores of lanterns gleamed blearily in the murk and the search-lights of the police sent shafts of light playing up from the waterfront.

Twenty-five feet from the river Gildersleeve found the Mounties holding back the crowd with hoarse commands, their carbines held crosswise before them.

Conjecture ran rife. "Cloud-burst in the hills," some one cried. And another: "Look, look, the Nannabijou River's roarin' full to the top of the banks!"

"The bridge is going!"

There came the wail of great timbers as they were twisted and torn from their places. As Gildersleeve's eyes became more adjusted to the dim, uncertain light, he saw that the torrent rode almost to the brim of the high banks of the Nannabijou, fully thirty feet above the

stream's normal level. In mad succession on its crest swirled logs, stumps, whole trees and other debris from the hills.

It was a terrifying, majestic sight, this great river moving out like an all-conquering, irresistible host, and carrying captive the things that stood in the way of its might as it swept from the confining hills to the freedom of the lake.

From beyond the mouth of the river, above the din of the storm and the freshet in the hills came a sibilant hissing sound like that when waves break over jagged reefs, only this was intensified a hundred-fold.

Shafts of light from the search-lights were flung over the bay.

"The booms are going out!"

Gildersleeve stood fascinated, dumb before the inevitable. The gorged river flinging itself out into the bay swept over the field of pulpwood an ever-widening tidal wave; then the poles rose through the boiling flood, heaving flat for one instant and the next rolled forward in great jams that again held until the invading torrent, gathering head, swept them before it in tossing, grinding masses.

The unequal struggle lasted but a few brief seconds. Then when the connecting links of the boom timbers beyond gave way the whole field of pulpwood sprang forward with a mighty, grinding roar and crowded out of the bay into the raging lake beyond where wind and wave carried it off in howling triumph.

In less time than it takes to tell the magnificent field, comprising thousands of cords of wood ready for grinding, had vanished all but an insignificant remnant the backwash had flung up on the shores of the bay.

The torrent in the river was gradually subsiding now, but still the crowd hung about in the drenching rain.

"What do you think caused it?" some one who had just come up asked of a little knot near Gildersleeve.

"Cloud-burst in the hills most likely," vouchsafed one of the group.

"Cloud-burst nothing," derided another. "I could tell you just what happened: The beaver-dam in Solomon Creek has busted and let that lake of water behind it loose."

"Anyway, it will make more work for the workers," piped a loose-tongued disciple of Lenine. "We'll be kept busy salvagin' them poles up along the shore till the freeze-up comes and all next spring. The North Star won't let all that good timber go to waste."

"Salvage!"

The word rang in the brain of Norman T. Gildersleeve like a clang of doom. It meant—it meant that those poles could now never be recovered in time to start the Kam City Mills on the date set by the government.

The crowd was thinning out, but Gildersleeve, soaked to the skin, stood as one in a daze till a police officer came up.

"Costly night's damage for the North Star Company, sir," he remarked gravely.

Norman T. Gildersleeve made a strange noise in his throat but no more coherent answer as he stood staring into the blackness over the lake.

"But then they say that timber can be salvaged in due time," suggested the friendly officer.

"Salvaged—in due time," echoed the financier vacantly. Then to the policeman's amazement he let loose a torrent of bitter curses and flung his arms about like a madman.

Back at the cabin Duff and Lynch ceased their chatter about the disaster at sight of Gildersleeve's grim, ghastly face. In silence he made preparations to retire.

Just before he blew out the light, Lynch approached Gildersleeve's bunk. "Will we be going up into the hills to look over that secret passageway in the morning?" he asked tactlessly.

"You can go where you damned well please—to hell and back, if you like," came the snarling retort. "Any place will suit me to-morrow—any place outside this cursed country."

But while Gildersleeve cursed the north country, as others who have failed to conquer its moods and its tremendous difficulties have cursed it, he sensed in this last disaster the hand of an agency that was not the elements—an inscrutable, sinister agency that had thwarted, blocked and bankrupted his projects on the North Shore for two decades—an agency that, however exotic the idea might seem, had in its destructive designs the co-ordination of the tempest.

As he tossed sleepless between the grey blankets his thoughts kept converging on something Lynch had given utterance to in the story of his flight down Nannabijou Mountain—something that faintly but insistently brought up black memories out of his early youth. He tried to think of other things, to laugh it away as a foolish bit of imagination. It was no use—the face of a youth rose before his tortured eyes, a face handsome and boyish, but very dark of skin. It was the eyes in that face—those terrible, great black eyes where he saw mirrored in turn entreaty, despair—then black, black hate.

"Alexander!"

Gildersleeve breathed it in wretched entreaty. His

hands involuntarily went upwards as he felt a stinging smash first under the right eye, next under the left. The points where the two tiny scars were stung like fire.

Then he heard. . . . Great God, he heard out in the night somewhere a cry that made his soul quake.

Gildersleeve sprang from his bunk. With hands that trembled he lit the lamp and shook Lynch into wakefulness.

"Lynch," he demanded, "that cry you heard up in the hills when you were coming down—just what was it like?"

The detective sat up blinking. "I'm not likely ever to forget it, Mr. Gildersleeve," he replied. "It was a howl that was half laughter, half wail—like the cry of a loon."

Gildersleeve started back a-tremble. "And—and did you see anything, Lynch?"

"S'help me the only living thing I saw I didn't want to tell you of before—you wouldn't believe it. As heaven is my judge, the thing that gave that terrible cry *was in the shape of a man.*"

"That's all I wanted to know, Lynch."

Gildersleeve stumbled back to his bunk leaving the light burning. Between teeth that chattered he mumbled to himself:—

"The cry of a loon—from a man. At last—at last, I understand."

CHAPTER XXIII

J.C.X.!

I

JOSEPHINE STONE was seated in the library of the chateau up in the Cup of Nannabijou after the zenith of the storm had passed that night. Earlier in the evening she and Mrs. Johnson with some apprehension had watched the storm coming up, but it broke with much less violence there than it did down on the waterfront, the high cliffs of the Cup effectually diverting the fury of the tempest, whose roar they could hear in the upper air while the rain came down in torrents. Mrs. Johnson, who was invariably up before the sun, retired early, but Miss Stone did not feel that she could compose herself for sleep. Since childhood high winds had always made her restless and nervous.

She had been sitting in her room reading a book she had brought up from the library. An hour had passed, when, above the lash of the driving rain, she was certain she heard the rumble of voices outside; then the opening and closing of a door in the building adjacent where the wireless station was located. Some of the Indians who looked after the place slept there, but she was sure they could not be up and about unless something unusual had happened. They invariably went to their slumbers and were not seen or heard from after sundown.

Josephine Stone got up and going to the window cautiously lifted a corner of the drawn blind. A light shone in the wireless building, but she could see nothing of

what was going on inside. The nervousness that was upon her precluded sleep and it was becoming too chilly to sit up in her room. She thought of going down to the library and building a wood fire in the huge fireplace. That would possibly cheer her up, she felt.

But when the fire was leaping high and crackling loudly she still felt the need of something to occupy her mind. There was an eerie, insistent personality to the library. Its high, small-paned French windows were heavily-curtained, and its furniture, of a substantial design several decades old, was upholstered in the same sombre brown tone that characterised the curtains and the great deep-piled rug that occupied the entire floor space. Curtained wall-shelves and ancient, glass-doored cases were crowded with leather-bound volumes of a heterogeneous variety as well as departmental government books in blue paper covers. There were several tiers of the classics, dog-eared and much thumb-worn, but the majority of the books were devoted to science, psychology, mineralogy and forestry. None of the books contained a name to designate to whom they belonged, though many of the older ones had fly-leaves torn from them that bespoke some one's precaution against identification.

The girl, tiring of rummaging through the books, turned her attention to the square, black mahogany piano across one corner of the room, wondering vaguely what might be the history of this strange place, what story these walls might tell if they could speak. It was a quaint old instrument with a wonderfully mellow tone. Some cultured person must have at some time occupied this chateau, some one of a distinctly scientific turn, she reflected. Who were they and what had become of them? She shivered involuntarily. Was it fancy, or did she sense a silent, unseen presence in this room?

She ran her lithe fingers over the keys and struck up

a popular air from memory. The music seemed to dissipate her oppression and lift the heavy melancholy of her surroundings.

The girl played on and on, until wearying of memory selections, she thought to look over a sheaf of music on the back of the instrument. During the pause she was sure she heard a light tapping at the door off the hall to her left.

She listened, at first quite startled; but when the tapping was repeated, something human and deferential in the summons reassured her.

II

Josephine Stone switched on the hall light, opened the door leading to the porch and drew back with a startled exclamation.

"Mr. Smith!"

But it was no longer fright that was upon her. Something was so daringly appropriate in his appearance, so grotesque on the part of the picturesque master of Nannabijou camps that she had to smile in spite of herself. She had never seen him thus garbed before; quite debonaire and at ease in a dark, tailored suit and the habiliments of a man of fashion—a handsome, compelling type, faultlessly groomed from his close-cropped, crisp black hair and clean-shaven face to the tips of his fine black shoes. Even his flicker of a smile, which usually had something grim and sinister in it, now radiated goodwill in its becoming elegance. Frank admiration shone in the lustre of his great black eyes.

He was bowing graciously, hat in hand. "I heard you playing," he said, "and I could not resist the temptation of looking in a moment."

She stood to one side holding the door for him. "Then

you invited yourself over; I suppose I must let you come in."

She knew it was not the proper thing at this hour, but then Josephine Stone was an unusual girl who had a ready confidence in herself. What she meant to do was to demand of him why she was being held a prisoner here—why she had been forcibly carried off from Amethyst Island by his band of Indians.

He accompanied her to the library. There she turned upon him, her whole demeanour intensely frigid. "Now then," she demanded, "I want you to tell me what all this means! Why have I been brought to this place against my will by your gang of cut-throats?"

She had meant to be acid, but there was that in his bantering smile that disarmed her, made her impotent to find the words that would humiliate him.

"No—not to-night," he declined. "It would take too long. To-morrow I will come to explain everything to you; then you may condemn me, excoriate me at your will. For these few rare moments to-night let us—just be friends."

"You choose rather unconventional hours for your friendly calls, Mr. Smith."

He laughed outright at the scornful thrust, a ringing, boyish laugh, totally unlike the sterner man she had known. "Perhaps you are right," he conceded, "but beggars can't be choosers, you know. I came in the first place because of the storm. I thought you might be nervous."

"And you came to entertain." Her glance travelled unconsciously to his clothing.

"I'm glad if I add to the gaiety of nations," he offered whimsically, "but my other clothing got soaked in the downpour coming here and these city decorations were the only things I had by that were dry. Catering to a

whim over the success of certain ventures, I put them on as a sort of celebration. Then I saw your light over here and heard you playing, and I thought I'd step over and see if everything was all right."

"All dressed up and you simply had to have some place to go," flashed Josephine Stone, but in a better nature that he made contagious.

"Likely that was it. Even in the bush people are vain once in awhile."

"But since you came to entertain and not to explain, Mr. Smith, wouldn't it have been really thoughtful to have brought along your Indian friend, Ogima Bush?"

"That might have proved quite difficult. Did you find Ogima entertaining?"

"In a Satanic way, yes. He has at least one virtue."

"Yes?"

"Consistency. He has no fickle moods; he is always just what he is—a savage."

That subtle thrust, she saw, went under the skin. "That's because you don't know Ogima," he observed gravely. "He is faithful to his friends and he has the rare quality of being sincere. Yes, and he *is* consistent. With the exception of those artificial red gashes under his eyes, Ogima is one hundred per cent. what he appears to be.

"But come," he urged with an apparent desire to change the subject, "aren't you going to play for me?"

She shook her head. A spirit of contrariness prompted her to tantalise him, to make this audacious, dandified czar of the big timber feel ill at ease.

"I had taken it for granted *I* was to be entertained," she insisted, smiling in spite of herself at the conceit of the tiny, scintillating white diamond in his tie.

But even in his present playful mood Acey Smith had his nimble wits with him. "To-morrow is your birth-

day," he observed irrelevantly, his flashing black orbs resting on hers momentarily. "You will be twenty-one and have reached a woman's estate."

It was she who was caught perplexed. "How—how did you know that?" she cried.

"The proverbial little bird must have been tattling to me. At any rate, it just now struck me that this being the eve of so important an anniversary your slightest whim should be gratified."

"Meaning what?" She was trying hard to feign indifference.

"That I must entertain you as you have insisted."

She watched him stride across the room. She thought at first he was going to the piano; instead he leant over the back of the instrument and brought up a black case from which he extracted a violin and bow.

"Now, what shall it be?" he asked with the bow poised.

"Oh, something light and lively—a popular air."

The shade of a frown flickered at his brows. "What I know is rather ancient; but it shall be as you command, *Milady Caprice*."

He struck up a bit from an old comic opera. Josephine Stone sank to a seat. There she lost sense of the bizarre nature of this scene. This man was no mean amateur airing a mechanical talent. He executed no flourishes; his form scarcely swayed as the bow rode the responding strings like a thing possessed of life.

The girl sat enraptured till he had concluded two rollicking melodies.

"Oh, you wonderful man!" It came from her spontaneously as she clapped her little hands in sheer delight. "Where did you learn to play so exquisitely?"

"An old man who once lived here taught me the rudiments. The rest I picked up."

"But it must have taken years of practice."

"It has been my one genuine diversion. I often come here when the mood seizes me and play for a solid evening—but never before to a living audience."

He was replacing bow and instrument in the case.

"Oh, don't do that," she entreated. "Just one more selection anyway, please."

Without show of diffidence he prepared to comply. "More light stuff?" he asked.

"No. Something serious—your own choice this time."

It was "Unrequited Love," from the opera *Rigoletto*, that he played, a rendition Josephine Stone was destined never to quite forget.

From the first tragic note the man before her seemed metamorphosed—seemed one with his exquisite violin; and, as the wailing, beseeching soul-cry of the rejected lover rose and fell, cried out in the volume of those notes the depths of its anguish, and tremulously swooned its everlasting despair, the player ceased for her to be Acey Smith, the piratical, sinister timber boss. He swayed before her fascinated gaze a beautiful disembodied spirit of melancholy calling to the subtlest deeps of her being. Once again, as on that memorable morning at the beach, the soul that looked out at her from those great, dark eyes was the soul of an untarnished boy—a soul brilliant and aspiring, no longer shackled to the clay of iniquity.

Unconscious she was that he drew nearer and nearer, a new light in his black, masterful eyes that was devouring, mesmeric. Unconscious she was in the spell of it that she had fluttered back on the divan—inert, a helpless thing, hopelessly enmeshed in the web of his romantic magnetism.

"Josephine!"

Bow and violin dropped heedlessly to the floor. He drew her hungrily to his arms, swept her from the divan,

from her feet and up to him till her panting form was folded to his own.

"Josephine, Josephine, Josephine!"

His voice was low and hoarse with passion, his face close to hers.

Then: "Great God, what a cad I am!"

III

The spell upon her was broken. But before she could cry out he had released her, his form a-tremble and his hands cupping piteously to his mouth in that weird gesture she had once before witnessed.

She staggered back, white to the lips, her hands clenched at her breast. "You—you—!"

Her accusing tones fell on him like blows as he stood with bowed head. "It is true," he acknowledged contritely. "I had forgotten a sacred trust—a trust I was unworthy of. But—but it shall not happen again."

She was steadying her trembling limbs. "I—I shall always be afraid of you now."

"Please do not say that," he implored. "You will not have much longer to endure my company."

At heart she was sorry for him already. Perhaps it was this physical trouble which seized him like the ague in moments of acute emotion that drew her woman's sympathy; perhaps she conceded it was the situation, the tenseness brought about by acute artistic emotion that was largely to blame—though he had the bigness to offer no such excuses.

At any rate, she could not find it in her heart to condemn this proud, handsome man, who, though he held her here utterly in his power, was abjectly humbled before the flash of her scorn.

Still she said: "There is only one explanation that might restore my confidence, and that is a genuine one as to why you had me brought here, why you insist on detaining me here."

He brightened. "To-morrow you shall have that explanation in full as I have promised you—after you have met J.C.X."

"J.C.X.?" She smiled incredulously.

"Yes. Circumstances made it necessary for you to move from Amethyst Island until such time as I was at liberty to carry out that promise. You demurred about leaving, while I feared disastrous intervention during my enforced absence in the east; that is why you were brought here in haste without your consent—that and my inherent weakness for the dramatic."

"Oh—at last a candid confession! Then let us get down to earth as quickly as possible. I am weary of playing Alice in Wonderland awaiting the production of your fabled monster. Mr. Smith, let me reciprocate in your candour. I have observed sufficient since I came to the Nannabijou Limits to convince me that there is only one head to the North Star Company, one man who rules and dictates here—and that man is yourself."

"True, but I do so under a trusteeship for J.C.X."

"You seem at least to have convinced yourself of his existence."

"You think it all a fraud—a hoax?"

"I'm afraid so. Others you may have succeeded in deluding as to the existence of this imaginary creature behind whose personality you carry on your affairs, but I will not believe until I see. Furthermore, I *don't* believe you can produce him."

"Then you shall see J.C.X.—to-night!"

IV

He took her arm and led her across the room to a point near the entrance to the hall. There he gently swung her so that she faced the wall and he stood directly behind her.

"Look," he indicated. "There you may see the J.C.X. for whom till to-night I have anonymously guided the affairs of the North Star."

Josephine Stone drew back with a startled cry. She was staring into a wall mirror *at the reflection of herself*.

"To-morrow," she heard his voice as from afar off. "To-morrow, she who until now has been known as J.C.X., takes living control of the affairs of the North Star. To-morrow, on her twenty-first birthday, she must, as the lawful heir to this property, bear with me while I give an account of my stewardship."

She heard, as in a dream, the hall door beyond closing softly. When she turned Acey Smith was gone. But out in the night somewhere there arose a tortured cry—a smothered cry that died out in the encompassing sweep of the storm.

Mad, she conjectured. . . . Yes, Acey Smith was a madman. Yet, her intuition told her, his was the madness of abnormal genius with a fixed purpose—always misunderstood—a desperate visionary with the imagination and power of will to make his mad dreams come true.

She—she "the lawful heir to this property!" Her grandfather had been previously referred to by Acey Smith. Could it be—?

But in her perplexed, unnerved state, Josephine Stone did the womanly thing. She went to her room and had a hearty cry.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN WHICH A FOOL EXPERIMENTS

I

SETTING out on his aërial trip over the Cup of Nannabijou did not prove so simple a matter as Hammond had at first conceived it would be. In the first place, he had to get permission from the department at Ottawa before the authorities at the Kam City armouries would even allow him to try out the plane. Though he despatched Inspector Little's wire immediately after his arrival, it was Monday afternoon before a reply was forthcoming.

The next delay was in getting the machine in shape for the trip. For want of expert attention, the motors and accessories were woefully out of tune, and before he felt satisfied that they were in anything like efficient shape it was too late to make the trip Monday. On the short trial flights he made the engine still showed a disposition to sulk, but by careful handling he managed to keep it alive while in the air.

He determined to fly over the Nannabijou Limits as early as possible Monday morning. Monday night the storm came up, one of the worst experienced in Kam City in years, and the shed out on the exhibition grounds in which he had temporarily housed the machine, was unroofed by the gale and minor damages done to the wings of the plane that it took a couple of hours to repair.

The morning, however, broke crisp and clear, an ideal day for flying and making observations. From Kam

City to the Nannabijou Limits was a little better than twenty miles, and Hammond figured he could make it in about twenty-five to thirty minutes at the outside.

But again he had trouble in making a start. Three times he went up and had to come down again to make fresh adjustments. It was ten o'clock before he was definitely on his way across the arm of the lake with the craterlike top of Nannabijou Mountain as his objective.

Though the wind had dropped, the lake was still creased with angry waves. He crossed Superior's upper arm without mishap. As he neared the limits, his first unusual discovery was the immense amount of pulpwood thrown up along the North Shore and on the islands that dotted it as far as the eye could see. There was only one place all those poles could come from, the airman conjectured as his machine roared onward through the bright, sunlit upper air.

His hunch was confirmed when he came opposite the limits and secured a full view of Nannabijou Bay, empty of almost every pulp-pole.

He dropped down for a closer look. The Mounties still patrolled the waterfront, but the camp was a scene of animated chaos. Gangs of men were at work repairing the roadways riven deep by the torrents of the night before while others were engaged in removing the fallen timber that blocked every thoroughfare. He noted that the bridge over the Nannabijou River was gone and the hills were made more desolate by fresh fields of tangled windfalls.

As he swooped, Hammond glimpsed Inspector Little signalling to him to proceed direct to the Cup and return. The young airman picked out a likely looking landing place back of the limits, then shot his machine upward. He followed the course of the Nannabijou to

the point where Solomon Creek made its confluence, when he swerved and followed the creek.

Below him now he could discern what had caused the flood that had swept down in the night and carried out the immense field of pulpwood boomed in the bay. The huge beaver-dam on the creek was gone, and where the lake had been, behind the dam, there remained only a slimy area of silt and mud. Thus it was brought home to him at a glance that the war between the rival lumber companies for the operating rights on the limits had been ended by the elements in favour of the North Star. . . . The elements alone? He wondered. . . . Likely here was another mystery in the history of the North Star that would remain unsolved. Nobody had seemingly thought of the possibilities in case that lake of water behind the beaver-dam were set free.

Significant as all these things were, Hammond's main interest was soon centred on the Cup of Nannabijou and its environs. As he glided over the draw in the cliffs along the creek trail to where it seemingly ended in the tunnel opening out over the rapids in the gorge he got a true perspective of the water-gate guarding the only entrance from the land side through the cliffs of the Cup. From his lofty point of observation he could note how the creek in the first place had cut a big oval-shaped "O" in the rock, leaving a high pinnacle in the centre.

But it was the man-made device for diverting the flow of water that most excited his curiosity. At the upper end, where the stream originally forked around the island of rock, was a contrivance like the walking-beam of an old-style steamship. From the ends of this beam, which sat in a steel pillar between the channels, connecting-rods reached down to sliding dams operating in slots cut in the sides of the channels. At the present moment, the dam on the western side was down, and the one on the

eastern side up, thus forcing the whole volume of water from the overflow of the lake in the Cup down the latter channel, whose bed, when the dam on that side was closed forcing the water around the other way, formed a dry continuation of the creek trail to an upper tunnel leading through the cliffs and into the Cup of Nannabijou.

Chains extending from concealed mechanism below the walking-beam proved the dams to be operated by power. A tiny building, cleverly cached in a natural opening in the rocks at the west side, and from which copper wire was strung into the Cup, housed the hydro-electric plant where the current was generated. Hammond was scientific enough to conceive that the water-gate and the gong-signal near it were animated by a concealed magnet system at the simple pressing of an electric button somewhere.

As he swept into the Cup, Hammond's discovery of the beautiful little mountain lake and the buildings above it, set off by their well-kept parklike surroundings, was even more of a revelation. From the plane it proved a wonderful picture—so wonderful that Hammond forgot he was in an area of danger until it recurred to him that here some place Josephine Stone was held captive.

But when he circled over the chateau and the wireless plant, he could discover no signs of life. He was certain if there were people about their attention would have long since been attracted by the roar of his engine. He decided to land and make an investigation in spite of the caution of Inspector Little that he should return to the camps after making observations from the air.

He slid down at a point in front of the bungalow.

II

The silence after quitting his machine seemed oppressive, and the place utterly deserted. He walked up on the verandah and rapped thrice on the chateau door. Receiving no answer, he tried the door. It was not locked, so he opened it and boldly entered. He was now determined to explore the building from top to bottom. The quaint, unusual appointments of the chateau at another time would have deeply interested him, but he felt he must work fast and be on the alert for surprise.

The rooms all bore the appearance of recent occupancy, but there were evidences that the house had been set in order before the departure of its people.

The sleeping chambers he examined last. All of these rooms had been swept, dusted and the beds made; but in one of them he picked up a fancy celluloid hair-comb. There was only one person on Nannabijou Limits to whom that could belong, and that was Josephine Stone.

The conviction brought home to Hammond from every quarter was that he had arrived too late. Josephine Stone's captors must have carried her off to some other fastness. He thought of the building adjacent, but on going there he found the doors and windows securely locked. The blinds, however, were up, and he could get a clear view of all the rooms and the wireless plant inside. There was nothing else there beyond a number of empty bunks, a table and a few chairs.

It struck him that there was possibly another retreat hidden away in some other part of the Cup—perhaps up in the woods. He returned to the plane intending to make a thorough search of the area in the Cup from the air. But his engine was in a decidedly balky mood. He had a feeling it would fail him altogether, and, on an impulse of better judgment, he swung up and over the cliffs.

He had barely reached the confluence of Solomon Creek with Nannabijou River when the motor went dead.

Fortunately, by skillful manipulation of the planes, he was enabled to glide safely down over the timbered sides of the mountain to the cleared area just above Nannabijou camps.

His plane was soon surrounded by wondering groups of camp workers from among whom there strode a member of the mounted force. He leaned close as Hammond was getting out of the machine.

"Inspector Little would like you to go down to his quarters at once, Mr. Hammond," he said. "I will see that your machine is taken care of."

III

The inspector's genial smile and hearty handshake did much to revive Hammond's drooping spirits over his non-success in finding trace of Miss Stone. "Mighty glad to see you back safe and sound, old man," he offered. "Find any clues up there as to the whereabouts of the young lady?"

Briefly Hammond gave a verbal report of his discoveries, adding that he was convinced Josephine was still held prisoner somewhere up in the Cup.

The inspector sat for a few moments in a brown study. "H'mph, that's interesting at any rate," he finally spoke up. "Your findings seem to bear out what I have already learned from other quarters."

"I'd like to return and finish the investigation as soon as I can get the old bus in working order," suggested Hammond.

"No, I couldn't approve of that," decided the inspector. "With that balky machine it would be too risky, and besides, it might give warning to the gang we're after if

they did not succeed in capturing you or doing you actual bodily harm."

"Then what do you propose to do?"

"To go up on foot with a half dozen picked members of our force just as soon as you've had a bite to eat and changed your flying togs. A private detective of Gildersleeve's—Lynch his name is—has discovered how that water-gate up there is operated, and we're taking him along to show us how to get in."

"Is Gildersleeve here?"

"He was, but he left for town on the early tug this morning, though I have a hunch I should have put him in custody until this whole thing is cleared up."

"You still suspect him of underhand work?"

"Just now I hardly know what to suspect. There seems to be some unholy mystery here that's mighty difficult to get to the bottom of. Gildersleeve may be innocent of having anything to do with the abduction of Miss Stone, but I am becoming more and more certain that there is some part he played out here he's anxious to conceal. I expect you noticed that the beaver-dam in Solomon Creek was gone and the head of water that came down last night forced out the booms of pulpwood in the bay?"

"Yes. I imagine Gildersleeve would be wild over that."

"Wild is no name for it. Before he left this morning he spent most of the time cursing everything and everybody. I think the man was drunk. Anyway, he insists that the North Star people blew up the dam with dynamite while the storm was on. But we can't take any action on mere conjectures. Even if the dam were blown up the freshet left no clues behind. Our men made a thorough investigation this morning and could find no proof that the dam did not give way through natural causes. Now Gildersleeve swears he's going after the

Dominion government for damages because we did not have a patrol watching the dam. I suppose we might have taken that precaution, but no one thought of danger from that direction."

"Without proof that the disaster occurred through preventable causes I don't see how he can produce grounds for damages," asserted Hammond.

"Nor I," returned the inspector. "Furthermore, Gildersleeve has not from the first dealt on the square with us or taken us into his confidence. Off-hand, I'd say he appears to me like a man who's been beaten to it at a game of double-cross where he was as deep-dyed as the other fellow and now he's aching to take his spleen out on a third party.

"But come, Hammond," urged the inspector, "you run along to the dining camp and have a snack of lunch, and as soon as you get your clothes changed we'll make a start."

IV

Sandy Macdougall was glad to see Hammond again, but he appeared to be particularly out of sorts and uncommunicative this morning. It was only when Hammond was leaving the dining camp that he had anything in particular to say.

"It ain't none of my business," he told Hammond, "but if I was asked for any advice, I'd say keep away from that Cup. There ain't anybody white ever went up there monkeyin' around that something didn't happen they were sorry for."

The little expedition which set out for the mountain was composed of Inspector Little, five of his most experienced men, Lynch the private detective and Louis Hammond. Before they struck out Inspector Little insisted there was no necessity for the civilians in the party

carrying firearms and used this as an excuse for relieving Lynch of a murderous-looking revolver.

Lynch was loud in his protests that as a detective he should be allowed to carry the weapon, but it did not go with the inspector. "I am not carrying a gun myself," he pointed out. "My men are armed and that is all that is necessary, for they are not liable to shoot unless it is a case of protecting our lives and their own."

It was not only that he sought to guard against unnecessary bloodshed, but Inspector Little was not any too sure of his ground in entering the Cup of Nannabijou by means of force. The police held no warrant for the arrest of any one except Nathan Stubbs, the pseudo camp preacher, and the doughty inspector was far from convinced that Stubbs was up in the Cup. The only pretext on which he felt he could legally demand the privilege of entering the Cup with an armed force, in case resistance were offered, was the right to search for the missing girl, Josephine Stone.

On the other hand, his distrust of Gildersleeve was growing, along with a conviction that the mysterious happenings on Nannabijou Limits were far from being what they appeared to be on the surface. In this latter regard, he was determined not to be made the catspaw of Gildersleeve through any trickery on the part of his detective.

The journey up the mountain and along Solomon Creek trail was made in comparative silence, except for the volubility of Lynch who bored the patient inspector with wild theories as to what existed beyond the cliffs of Nannabijou.

When they reached the tunnel that opened out over the rapids of the creek, Lynch was all impatience to demonstrate his prowess in showing how the water-gate was operated. He reached up to the jutting bit of rock and

fumbled for the tiny hole and inserted a match which he pressed.

There came instantly the mellow alarm of the bell above.

"Cripes, that's sudden action for you," he exclaimed. "I hardly pressed my finger on the match when the bell rang. It must be set on some sort of hair-trigger."

Almost immediately the water in the channel dwindled and ceased to flow.

"That's certainly a novel device," declared the inspector as he stood with the others of the party staring at the stream-bed where the last trickle of water had vanished.

"Watch while I let it loose again," cried Lynch. "Keep back, everybody, for she certainly comes down hell-bent when she's opened."

"Hold on! Don't touch it!"

Inspector Little and Louis Hammond, certain they caught the sound of voices somewhere above, yelled it in unison.

But there was no stopping the irrepressible Lynch. The gong sounded again, followed by the roar of the released torrent.

From up the channel there came a man's hoarse shout and the piercing scream of a woman.

"Shut off the water, you damned idiot!" shouted Inspector Little.

But Lynch, in the excitement, had completely lost his wits. He didn't seem able to locate the button again.

The inspector sprang back and shoved the detective out of the way while he reached for the projecting match in the hole himself.

Louis Hammond, at the edge of the raging torrent, stood transfixed, terrified at what he saw being flung down toward him on the crest of the maddened tide.

CHAPTER XXV

"THE MAN THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN"

I

UNUSUAL commotion below stairs awakened Josephine Stone at a very early hour the morning following the storm. She arose and opened the door to listen. Mrs. Johnson, fully dressed, came down the hall.

"Oh, are you getting up, Josephine?" she greeted. "We didn't intend calling you for an hour or so."

"It was the noise. What's going on downstairs?"

"Didn't you know? Why, I was wakened at an unearthly hour by your Indian maid, Mary. She's back with us again. She said Mr. Smith told her you were leaving here to-day and it had been found necessary to make an early start. I saw Mr. Smith downstairs, and he said there was a boat waiting at the tunnel at the other end of the Cup to take us and our belongings back to Amethyst Island. I—I thought you knew all about it, Josephine?"

"Why, yes—I had forgotten. Mr. Smith called last night after you had gone to bed to notify me."

"Did he tell you about that terrible-looking Indian chief?"

"Who—the Medicine Man? What has he done now?"

"He's dead, poor man."

"Dead?"

"Yes. Killed in the storm last night. Something terrible must have happened, for the Indians all looked so

broken up this morning that I asked Mary what was the matter with them. She said Ogima Bush, their great Medicine Man, was gone up to the sky and they'd never see him again. All I could get out of her was that he was 'making some big medicine' whatever that is, and he was carried away by the storm-devils. They're so queer, those people, I never can quite understand them."

"Poor Ogima," breathed Josephine Stone. "I don't think there was anything so terrible about him as he painted himself up to look. Sometimes there seemed to be something terribly tragic in those wicked eyes of his."

"Come now, Josie," admonished Mrs. Johnson, "don't you go getting dressed. Mr. Smith said it would be all right if you were called an hour from now."

But Miss Stone had no intention of going back to bed. She dressed and went downstairs. The Indians were busy getting baggage ready on the verandah for transportation down to the boat.

As breakfast wasn't quite ready, Miss Stone strolled down to the lake. There she was a few minutes later joined by Acey Smith. He was garbed in his bush clothes and the personality of the man had undergone one of those undefinable changes so characteristic of him. Where he had been buoyant, care-free and boyish the night before he was now politely formal, inscrutable—a self-contained Big Boss of the timberlands.

"I was sorry to have had to decide on an early start without having let you know last night, Miss Stone," he opened. "But about four o'clock this morning I was awakened by a wireless call from the city, notifying me that some busy-body was having an airman sent over the Cup to-day, so I decided, if possible, we'd leave the Cup before the air-scout arrived."

"More mystery?" Miss Stone had not exactly meant to be sarcastic.

Acey Smith gave vent to a low, harsh laugh. "No, the mystery stuff, so far as you are concerned is over," he assured her. "And that brings me to the point I came down here to speak to you about. This morning after breakfast, if you feel equal to it, I would like you to take a walk with me up to the summit of Lookout Cliff yonder." He pointed to a castle-like formation in the wall of rock to the east.

"But I thought we were leaving here this morning?"

"We are. But while the Indians are taking Mrs. Johnson and your belongings around to Amethyst Island, I thought you might let me take you up there to enjoy the wonderful view it affords while I tell you the story of the North Star and how you came to be woven into its history."

"Couldn't I hear it down at the Island?"

"You could, but there is an appropriate reason why you should be shown that view on this, your twenty-first birthday."

"Very well," acceded the girl, "I'll go."

II

Josephine Stone and Acey Smith made their start for the summit of Lookout Cliff right after breakfast. The superintendent appeared with his inevitable pack-sack strapped on his back, and after giving final instructions to the Indians, motioned her to accompany him.

The walk up the gradual ascent through the woods to the foot of the cliff was refreshing and invigorating, but, after the custom on northern trails, neither spoke except when it was absolutely necessary. The man seemed deeply preoccupied and the girl made no attempt to draw him out of his reverie.

There were moments when to her Acey Smith seemed

sublime—a sort of genie of this wild, wonderful country. She believed she liked him best in this mood. In his high boots, corduroys and stetson with its narrow limp brim slightly turned up off his forehead, he had the bearing and the mien of some fiercely handsome robber chieftain. His face, set like a mask, was never turned toward her; his eyes seemed always fixed on the trail above. She found herself walking in his wake, quite as naturally as the Indian woman trails after her brave in their journeys through the wild.

They paused for a few moments' rest at the base of the cliff before starting the ascent of the winding pathway that led to the summit. Suddenly a rapidly-vibrating roaring sound broke in upon them from the upper air.

"The airplane has arrived," commented Acey Smith, pointing to the machine swooping over the cliffs at the water-gate. "Just a little too late to find out anything worth while."

"Who do you suppose it is?" asked the girl.

"It's a government machine sent to locate you. I think likely it's been put on the job at the request of your friend, Mr. Hammond."

He watched her covertly as the colour came and went in her cheeks at the mention of Hammond's name.

"Mr. Hammond!" she gasped. "Oh, then, we must go back and send word to him that I am safe and sound."

"No, it will not be necessary," he declared. "Mr. Hammond will be none the worse for a few hours' suspense. You will meet him before the sun sets to-night, and you will then be the better able to explain everything."

"Is he still down at the limits?"

"Yes, I think he's back, though the last news I had of him he was in Kam City. He had a falling out with

Norman T. Gildersleeve and quit the services of the International Investment outfit. I expect he discovered they weren't altogether the innocent angels they pretended to be." He paused a moment, then: "Hammond is what few men of ability are nowadays—clean-cut and honest to the core."

The girl dropped her eyes to hide the gratitude that welled up in them. What had it cost Acey Smith to make that magnanimous statement? For she knew now that he knew what she could not give to him would be Hammond's for the asking.

They watched the plane make a landing, saw the airman examine the grounds and buildings, then re-enter his machine and fly away over the cliffs.

"Evidently thought better of staying overlong in the Cup," commented Acey Smith. "Oh, well, there was nothing for him to fear; my men have instructions to molest no one coming here from now on."

"You mean that the Cup will no longer be a secret retreat?"

"That all depends; it is a matter now for some one else to decide," he answered. "Let's go on up to the top."

III

The summit of Lookout Cliff offered a wonderful view on this clear day of the lake and the forests below. Nannabijou camp from there seemed a tiny gash in a world of wilderness; the river and Solomon Creek silver threads winding down to Superior. On the outer side the cliff descended, a sheer wall, five hundred feet to the woods on the side of the mountain, the elevation being one thousand seven hundred and fifty feet above sea-level. The cliff is known among sailormen of the Great Lakes as the highest piece of land on the North Shore.

"This pinnacle," Acey Smith was saying, "was held sacred by the pagan Indians as the eerie of the Thunder Eagle, a demi-god supposed to rule the land and the water as far as his eyes could see.

"It therefore did not seem unfitting," he continued quietly, "to bring you to this spot to declare you, as I do now, undisputed mistress of the North Shore."

She looked at him thoroughly bewildered, for the moment unable to think what answer to make.

"I told you there would be no mystery after to-day," he went on, "and what I am about to tell you is bald fact. To-day, on your twenty-first birthday, Miss Josephine Stone, you become heir to the estate of your grandfather, Joseph Stone, and that estate now includes all the holdings of the North Star Towing and Contracting Company and the controlling share in all its various subsidiaries. In compliance with the dying injunction of your grandfather, the ownership of those properties has been transferred to your name, where they were formerly held in trust by myself and the executives of the North Star for you under the pseudonym of 'J.C.X.' "

"But I can't understand all this," she murmured in perplexity. "Grandfather, I always understood, was not very wealthy. He was merely a prospector and scientist."

"True," replied her companion, "and in what you do not understand lies the story—a story in which I'm afraid I will have to tell altogether too much about myself."

"Please *do* tell me," she urged. "I am sure I will be deeply interested in that very part of it."

"Then let's step over yonder where we will be sheltered from the breeze and still have the benefit of the sunshine."

Acey Smith unslung his pack and hung it by one of the straps on the bough of a stunted jackpine whose roots somehow drew sustenance from a crevice near the edge of the cliff. He led the girl to a seat on a moss-covered ledge and himself sat down facing her.

IV

The superintendent placed a cigarette in a holder and lit it.

"The story," he opened, "should properly start with the advent of John Carlstone here half a century ago. 'Black Jack' Carlstone, as he was known, was an eastern Canadian, the second generation of the old pioneer school and a mixture of the romantic races that migrated to the Niagara Peninsula from the valley of the Mississippi in the States—English, Welsh, Dutch and Irish blood ran in his veins. He was a tall, powerfully-built, black-whiskered demon of a man, with a heart as great as his physical dimensions—a man who was known to recognise no such elements as difficulty or danger. He was a born trader, the particular type that made good and amassed fortunes in those tremendous days.

"John Carlstone located near a trading-post which then thrived on what is now the site of Kam City, and it was not long before he was identified with almost every undertaking in which there was money to be made, bartering with the Indians for furs, getting out timber and building wharfs and roads for the government. There were few white women in the North in those days, and John Carlstone took as his wife the daughter of an Indian chief who was headman of all the North Shore tribes, and, standing little on ceremony, was married under the pagan rites of the Indians.

"With the birth of his son there came two heavy blows

to John Carlstone. He lost his wife, and her child was cursed with an infirmity that came of a prenatal accident. In moments of stress or high nervous excitement, the boy would be overcome with a strange paroxysm and cry out with the weird, unearthly call of the northern loon. But this son, despite his infirmity and the fact that he inherited a skin the colour of his mother's race, was the apple of John Carlstone's eye. He named him Alexander, because, as he told the boy when he grew older, 'Alexander was a conqueror, and you must conquer all this wild North Shore some day.' It was a remark that afterwards rang in the consciousness of Alexander Carlstone with all the glamour of prophecy.

"Young Carlstone was from the first a dreamer of wild dreams of power—a boy apart and an albino among his playmates. Timid, studious and extremely sensitive in the beginning, the ridicule of his fellows begot the first bitterness that was later to engulf his whole better nature.

"The elder Carlstone's wealth grew and grew. He became the owner of a modest fleet of lake boats and a string of inland trading-posts. Dissatisfied with the progress he was making in the crude pioneer school, Carlstone sent his son east to be educated at a private college, where the lad, under a sympathetic teacher, went far and quickly in his studies. He grew to know that he had inherited his father's initiative and force of character along with an abnormal gift for grasping and visualising situations that baffled the analyses of others. The father planned to make a great merchant or business man of him; the son dreamed of becoming a star on the stage. Young Alexander Carlstone knew that the fire that burned in his veins was the fire of a born protagonist. But he hid this ambition from his father and even his teacher; he felt he must first overcome the affliction that had clung to him since birth.

"While his son was away at school the elder Carlstone married again, this time to the widow of Captain Norman Gildersleeve, who had been master of one of Carlstone's boats. She was a designing, unscrupulous woman, and she brought with her a son, some years older than Carlstone's, who inherited all his mother's malicious and covetous nature. But with John Carlstone's undying affection for his son, the influence of the Gildersleeves might not have cut much figure in the latter's life had it not been for a whim of Fate and the Law—the damnable travesty on Justice that men call the Law.

v

"Young Carlstone had completed what would be the equivalent of a modern public and high school education when one day there came the most unfortunate moment of his life with tidings of the death of his father, the one true friend who believed in him and would have sacrificed all for him right or wrong. The elder Carlstone was drowned out of a canoe during a storm on one of the inland lakes; the wilderness from which he had won affluence and wealth swallowed him.

"That was the crucial turning-point in the life of young Alexander Carlstone, the end of the dramatic career which he had dreamed of—the last chapter in the life of the Man That Might Have Been.

"Owing to the lack of telegraph service across Canada at that time, the news of his father's passing was almost a week in reaching the young man. The latter was out of funds and none had been sent him. His big-hearted teacher, touched by the anguished grief of his pupil, advanced the cost of his transportation home, though young Carlstone read in his moist old eyes a something that was prescient of worse woes to come.

“Alexander Carlstone arrived at Kam City to find the doors of his father’s house closed against him. Norman T. Gildersleeve, son of the woman who was John Carlstone’s second wife, came out and ordered him off the premises. An altercation followed, in the heat of which Gildersleeve cried:—

“‘Get out of here, you tramp; get out or I’ll send for the provincial police to throw you out! You have no claim here—you are nameless.’

“A presentiment of just what his dark words meant staggered Carlstone for the moment. ‘Say that again!’ he defied.

“‘I’ll say it,’ mocked the other. ‘You are a nobody, and in the eyes of the Law you are not John Carlstone’s heir. Your mother was merely his squaw mistress.’

“At that taunt, young Carlstone saw all red. He bore down upon Gildersleeve with the fury of a savage and struck as his fighting father would have struck. Gildersleeve went over before a terrific blow that laid his cheek open below the right eye. When he struggled to his feet he was knocked down again with a similar smash under the left optic. As he lay upon the ground, his face covered with blood, Carlstone stood over him uttering the terrible cry that since infancy had afflicted him in moments of high excitement.

“In his blind fury, young Carlstone might have finished for good the usurper of his birthrights had it not been that passersby intervened. As it was, he left two scars upon the face of Norman T. Gildersleeve that he was to carry all his life.”

Josephine Stone shuddered. It was not altogether at the recital of the details of the fight, but at remembrance of those very scars beneath the eyes of the man she had seen with Louis Hammond that night on the transconti-

mental train. She did not interrupt, however, as Acey Smith proceeded:

"Alexander Carlstone was placed under arrest and tried before the district magistrate on a charge of felonious assault with intent to kill. The district attorney was a fair man, and in view of the provocation, reduced the charge to common assault and battery. The magistrate, a born snob and the voluntary creature of the now powerful Gildersleeve family, imposed a fine of fifty dollars, in default of which young Carlstone was to spend six months in jail.

"Staunch old friends of John Carlstone came to the rescue of his unfortunate son. They engaged a lawyer to defend him, and when he was sentenced, they supplied his fine that he might not have to bear the further ignominy of spending a term in jail. They even went further and started to raise a fund to defray the legal expenses of a fight for his rights in the courts.

"But it turned out that what Norman T. Gildersleeve had said was based on the Law—the Law which was made to crush the souls of the unfortunate and to protect the smug hypocrites who revere it and Gold as their established gods. John Carlstone's first marriage to an Indian chief's daughter, under the red man's rites, was not recognised by Church or State; the son therefore was nameless and had no rights under the Constitution. The further fact that John Carlstone had neglected to make a will left the younger Carlstone's case hopeless.

"Alexander Carlstone fled from the haunts of civilisation, filled with a consuming bitterness of spirit, an atheist so far as garbled Justice and revamped Christianity were concerned and nursing an undying hatred for the usurper, Norman T. Gildersleeve.

"In his soul had been sown the self-same germs that have bred history's bloodiest revolutions."

CHAPTER XXVI

"THE MAN THAT WAS"

I

"JOSEPH STONE, your grandfather, was one of those vitally interested in the fate of young Carlstone," continued Acey Smith. "The old scientist and prospector had been a personal cronie of John Carlstone; in fact, the latter had been of financial assistance to him in some of his early ventures. But in his eerie out here in the Cup of Nannabijou, where he lived to himself, Joseph Stone did not learn of his friend's death and the disappearance of his son until he made one of his periodical visits to the city for supplies. The old man was deeply grieved and made diligent inquiry for the whereabouts of Alexander Carlstone, but the young man had then been away several weeks and none knew whither he had gone.

"Joseph Stone was himself a heart-hungry old man, his own only son having left him during an altercation in which the younger Stone had insisted on their leaving the wilderness for the western prairies where he saw a more prosperous future for both. The upshot of it all was that the son left for the West, swearing that he would never darken his father's door again. And he never did.

"It must be stated that your grandfather, though a learned and open-hearted man, was extremely eccentric in some respects. He had invested almost all of his modest fortune in equipping a laboratory in this faraway

fastness. He managed somehow to eke out a living by engaging in trapping in the cold months and occasionally doing exploring and investigating work in the then little known interior for the government. His passion, however, was for scientific research, and his one ruling hobby was to discover the answer to the riddle of pigmentation whereby the colour is transmitted to the bodies and faces of the dark-skinned races of men. His theory was that black, red, brown and yellow men were so because of the prevalence of a tiny germ secreted in the intricacies of the cuticle, and that this germ while alive resisted the bleaching effects of the actinic rays of the sun's light. He not only pursued his research in this matter to a successful conclusion, but actually produced a formula for a solution, which, when applied to the skin, killed the active colour germs, so that only a few moments of exposure to the sunlight, after treatment, would turn dark men or red men white. Fortunately or unfortunately, as the case may have been, his secret died with him.

"It was through the pursuit of these experiments and an Indian witch-doctor, who was none other than our friend, Ogima Bush, that Joseph Stone quite unexpectedly came in contact with the lost Alexander Carlstone. The medicine men among the tribes and some of the more exalted chiefs were the only Indians that would dare enter the sacred Cup of Nannabijou to visit the white magician as they called him. Ogima the crafty was a frequent caller. Joseph Stone cultivated him because the Indian witch-doctor was something of an uncanny chemist himself in a primitive way, though there are secrets among the medicine men of the pagan tribes that it is better for the white man's morals and peace of mind that he should never dabble in.

"It so happened that when Joseph Stone had completed his formula for bleaching the skin that he wanted

to experiment on Ogima, but to his intense surprise the Medicine Man became very indignant at the suggestion. Why should he or any of his people wish to be white? Wasn't the red man of more noble lineage and the very colour of his skin emblematic of the superior favours the sun-god had conferred upon him? Any such trifling, he declared, would bring a curse upon his people, and he would see that they had none of it.

"The Medicine Man's word was law among the Indians, and Joseph Stone was in despair of finding a living subject for experimentation until, one day, Ogima, after a long smoke by the fireplace in the cabin, made the announcement that he had discovered a young man among the bands who should have been born white, and if Stone wished to try his witchcraft on this young man, Ogima would send him to him.

"The scientist was perplexed at the Indian's sudden change of front. He suspected some extraordinary favour would be extracted in return; but Ogima's only pronouncement was that once he was changed to white the young man in question must remain so and must no longer call himself an Indian. He left abruptly with a promise that he would go immediately in search of the subject. In three mornings he predicted the young man would be waiting in the tunnel below the water-gate which was then operated by hand on a given signal from below.

"On the third morning what was Joseph Stone's amazement and delight to discover that the young man sent him by Ogima Bush was none other than Alexander Carlstone, son of his deceased benefactor. Carlstone subsequently told him that since he had left Kam City he had been living among the Indians of his mother's tribe, and on account of her lineage he had been created a chief or headman of the band. But these honours had

brought no joys; supreme discontent had gnawed at him always. The red man's ways, he found, were not his ways, and he wanted to be away doing more useful things; to have his white man's sagacity and ambition pitted against problems and difficulties life among those primitive people did not offer. He had come to regard himself with supreme self-pity as neither a white man nor a savage; as an outcast from the former and a lonely, discontented demi-god among the latter.

"I will not burden you with a detailed account of what followed, Miss Stone," Acey Smith went on. "The experiment was gone on with at once, but by degrees, Carlstone first submitting his hands and face to the solution. When it was over and he surveyed himself in a glass he could scarcely believe it was himself that was reflected there, the metamorphosis was so great. Thus transformed, and wearing white man's apparel, young Carlstone went back among the Indians, pretending to be a trapper lost in the woods. His real identity was suspected by none of the tribe.

"The realisation of what this change might mean inspired Alexander Carlstone with the first hazy elements of what afterwards became a daring scheme. He was filled with a savage rejoicing that came not entirely from vanity over his white skin, but from the knowledge that this transformation would make him unrecognisable as Alexander Carlstone, the outcast of civilisation. At the bottom of it all, though he himself did not fully realise it at the time, was a restless ambition, a consuming desire for power and the opportunity to exert that power to avenge his wrongs.

II

"I once contended with you," continued the man to whom Josephine Stone listened as one in a dream, "that

there is in all of us at least two personalities—the Man That Is and the Man That Might Have Been. The Man That Is is the man begot of environment and circumstances; the Man That Might Have Been is the ideal we cherished in hopeful youth. For it is circumstance that fashions our careers for us, no matter how cozy-corner philosophers may argue to the contrary, just as the hills and harder rock formations divert the courses of streams in their search for yonder lake and the ultimate sea. Oftentimes, an even-flowing, placid stream is thus suddenly transformed into a turbulent rapids, dealing destruction to all that enters the path of its fury. The analogy holds good with humankind.

"In this case, Alexander Carlstone, who had dreamed of becoming a famous actor in the world of the mimic drama, became Acey Smith the Timber Pirate, a protagonist in a drama of real life, always with a grim climax of revenge in view. As I see it now, I have always been acting a self-proscribed part, putting into it the same intensity I might have otherwise concentrated on the theatrical stage. Acey Smith is the man that was made by circumstances—the Man That Is. For, as you have no doubt surmised, Miss Stone, I was first Alexander Carlstone and afterwards Acey Smith.

"But all this is digression. I did not at once set out to accomplish the ambition that burned within me. Instead, I dreamed and planned and plotted while I studied in the library of Joseph Stone. Dimly, I believe, there was always a plan of action somewhere hidden in my back mind, but the road to its interpretation was continuous, concentrated mental drudgery. The element of accident has done more to solve men's problems than so-called inspirations; it remained for subsequent circumstances to point the way to my goal for me.

"Joseph Stone told me of a simple tablet, that, dis-

solved in the mouth, would prevent the loon-cry that rose in my throat in moments of excitement, a remedy which I have since always kept by me. Meanwhile, in the rôle of a white trapper, I made frequent trips to Kam City, which had by then grown to the status of quite a thriving northern town, with a lake port whose future was unquestioned. It was to be the gateway between the East and the wheat-producing West just then opening up in full earnest. In bitterness I saw the opportunity and wealth that might have been mine; in double bitterness I discovered that the usurper, Gildersleeve, had become the leading man of the place and owned and controlled nearly all the important commercial undertakings in the town. One day I passed him on the street and was thrilled that he did not recognise me. I had no inclination to set upon him. My own calmness under the circumstances amazed me. I could wait, something within me seemed to whisper; my time would come.

"Joseph Stone was biding his time about giving his discovery to the world. I was living proof of its efficiency, but there was one other thing he wished for before he set out to make all the races of the world white, and that was independent financial means. For the accomplishment of this dream he depended on a rumour that came to him of indications of a rich gold mine far in the interior.

"It was in the late autumn of my twentieth year that Joseph Stone and I set out to locate the gold vein that he believed existed far up the Nannabijou River. We took no guides and travelled light, for to both of us the wilderness was an open book. To be brief, after a month of the pack-trail and patient prospecting, we did discover the gold vein, which gave indications far beyond the expectations of either.

"But winter came down with the sudden intensity which is often its wont in the North. We were awakened one night by the cold and the howling of a raging blizzard. We decided to set out on the return journey at once, particularly on account of a shortage of vegetables and flour.

"As the rivers and lakes were frozen over, we had to abandon our canoe, and, as we had brought no snowshoes with us, the going through the fine, loose snow was exceedingly hard on the old man. Joseph Stone, I could see, was gradually breaking down under the hardships of the gruelling journey and the assaults of the cold. A cough he had developed and the deepening shadows under his eyes were symptoms of the dreaded grippe. Day by day his inertia increased until he finally pitched over and begged me to let him go to his last sleep in the snow while I pushed on.

"I was carrying him on my back rolled up in blankets when I fortunately came upon a band of roving Indians, from whom I borrowed a string of dogs, a sled and a pair of snowshoes. Thus equipped, after I had gone back up the trail and secured the provisions and equipment we had cached when Stone broke down, I bundled the sick man up on the sled and made haste to reach the cabin in the Cup.

"Joseph Stone breathed his last one night on the trail within a day's journey of home. Just before he died he cried out:—

"'You won't forget, the mine goes to—'

"Then his voice failed him, but what I caught when I bent near was a whispered, *'to J—— C—— when twenty-one.'*

"With his last breath he called upon the spirit of my father, 'Black Jack' Carlstone, to witness the injunction he had made to me.

"It was in my subsequent reflections standing there in the trail by the dead man that a mad inspiration as to the course of my future operations came to me in a flash. From Joseph Stone I had previously learned the story of his son's leaving him in white anger years before. The father had never forgiven what he deemed ingratitude, and he apparently never heard from the younger Stone again until his widow wrote of his death and the subsequent birth of a daughter, who had been named in her grandfather's honour, Josephine Stone. Joseph Stone never answered that letter, but he cherished the picture of the baby the mother had sent with it, and, as he always referred to the child as 'Josie,' there was never any doubt that his whispered '*J—— C——*' was meant to be Josie.

"It was like the eccentric old scientist to thus give out his last orders. His oral will that the property was not to go to his grand-daughter until she was twenty-one might ordinarily have presented legal difficulties; but to me that injunction presented the opportunity that comes to a man but once in a lifetime, if it comes at all.

III

"I went back to civilisation as 'A. C. Smith,' using my actual initials as a prefix to a pseudonym I felt would stir up the least curiosity. Part of my plan of future operations was to keep my own personality as much in the background as possible. I also devised the pseudonym, 'J.C.X.' to represent Josephine Stone until she became of age and heiress to the estate, but to have a legal significance as a trust account in the bank it had to be made 'J. C. Eckes.' It was in favour of J.C.X. that I filed the claim on the gold mine property, giving it out that I was acting for this other party who wished to be iden-

tified as little as possible with the transactions and had left me the authority to take care of them. The drafting up of a fictitious written agreement to this effect caused me no qualms of conscience, for I had long since lost any reverence I might have held for legal technicalities.

"The following summer the mining claim was sold for thirty-five thousand dollars. It was more than it subsequently proved to be worth, for the vein was only a shallow out-cropping. But fortune was already playing into my hands, for Norman T. Gildersleeve, who was one of the heaviest shareholders in the company that bought it, lost a lot of money developing it. Through the mine, unexpectedly, I had dealt him his first blow.

"That thirty-five thousand dollars brought the North Star Towing and Contracting Company into existence as a one-tug-and-barge concern. As Acey Smith, a man from nowhere, I became its skipper and general outdoors executive, but its actual ownership in the name of J.C.X. was known only to its bankers. The general public believed it was backed by a syndicate of eastern capitalists, a delusion I took every means to foster.

"The North Star prospered from the start. From then on its progress was like that of a thing of destiny. Gildersleeve, who, with his associates, had until now almost a complete monopoly of marine work, at first paid little attention to the insignificant North Star. He was then more concerned with city real estate and western land ventures. It was not until it was announced that a leading Kam City citizen, holding the patronage from Ottawa, had been appointed president of the North Star that he became at all alarmed. What he did not fully realise was that this political trickster and professional lobbyist had been bought body and soul for the use of his name and his influence at the capital. He was merely a dummy president, as all the presidents of the North

Star since have been, with no more real executive authority than the man in the moon.

IV

"Gildersleeve woke up too late. His first cold realisation that he had a dangerous rival came when the North Star secured a huge government contract for harbour dredging and improvements, for which an appropriation of two million dollars had been placed in the parliamentary estimates. With the money credit established by the acquisition of this contract, the North Star was enabled to invest in a formidable fleet of tugs and the most modern dredging equipment.

"There was no stopping now—the North Star's only salvation lay in continuous expansion to the last shred of money credit and the gobbling up of every worthwhile contract. High capitalisation and enormous daily overhead had to be met with tremendous production and what the newspapers call profiteering on a large scale. There is an advanced stage of development of a commercial enterprise when its directing head must chloroform his conscience. The North Star had reached that stage. It was a case of destroying or being destroyed. The war between the North Star and the Gildersleeve interests was on in deadly earnest, and I saw to it that the North Star was continuously the aggressor.

"Gildersleeve was no fool as a business man, and under his smug cloak of respectability he knew no scruples save where the law might halt him. But, as his potential destroyer, I had made a thorough, patient study of his weaknesses rather than his strength. He had so long been used to easy, safe stages of progress that he had lost the initiative of a plunger. He considered too long and was over-cautious; while Gildersleeve was hold-

ing long-winded conferences with his associates and executives, the North Star was striking hard where it was least expected to strike.

"Through a thoroughly organised private intelligence department, I knew the Gildersleeve plans before they were put into operation. The North Star too held conferences; but they were merely 'blinds,' the plans of the company being devised by none but myself, and none knew what they were until orders went out to the president over the signature of 'J.C.X.'"

"I picked my men for their ability to carry out instructions quickly and thoroughly. I had no need for generals or advisors; except that their recommendations regarding campaign plans gave me an idea what other people, including our competitors, would be liable to conceive we were about to do. If such recommendations tallied with the plans already formulated, I promptly discarded the latter and set about devising entirely different methods. The North Star never did the obvious thing, and the element of surprise invariably helped carry the day.

"The North Star took a controlling interest in powerful newspapers it could use, and it used their news columns and editorials in a subtle manner that never gave them the appearance of mere organs. To be a power in the land and so many stuffed clubs to drive the politicians to do the North Star's bidding, they had to be papers of the people and with the people.

"The general conception that a mysterious outside personality directed the affairs of the North Star had become a fixed make-believe with myself. I actually used to come here to the cabin in the Cup to 'consult' the fictitious J.C.X., playing upon the violin the music that was *en rapport* with my mood. And with the music would come flashes of inspiration from what I held to

myself was the unseen agency of J.C.X. It was whimsical, childish, if you like, but one must so pamper the sub-conscious if he would have it function.

"The North Star's great smash was the capture of the government ice-breaking contracts for spring and fall, which the Gildersleeve interests held until we had J. J. Slack elected to the Commons, elevated to the cabinet and made him our president.

"The North Star gave Gildersleeve no quarter. A series of other swiftly-succeeding coups broke the back of Gildersleeve's control on the upper Lakes. Soon his boats were lying idle at their docks, and when in a tight year they were offered for sale at what would be little better than their value as junk, the North Star secretly financed other small companies to buy up the best of them, in order to make sure there would not even be crumbs left for its rival.

"The North Star had gained undisputed monopoly of the Upper Lakes, and it now turned its attention to inland activities, seeking where it could strike Gildersleeve most vitally. It became a byword that the unknown clique who guided the North Star could make and break other men and businesses at its pleasure. Politicians and the so-called rulers of the land came seeking the North Star ready to do its pleasure. It seems to be a fact that the mob respect and fear only that which remains a profound mystery to them. The unsolved riddle of the North Star's ownership and direction inspired a morale among its executives and workers that familiarity with the master mind of the enterprise would have negated. Its operations and swift expansion to the exclusion of others came to be looked upon with a sort of numbed fatalism by its rivals and enemies. It seemed to appropriate with ease what it willed on land and water; but none knew the continuous drudgery of one man's

imagination to bring about those very things. And the North Star fostered and preserved an element of colour that distinguished it from the drab grind of most big business undertakings—it was picturesque as well as successful.

"Before the year 1914, when the Great War broke out, the North Star had driven Norman T. Gildersleeve from every holding he had originally usurped in the estate of John Carlstone, and from other enterprises he held stock in in Canada. He fled to the States, a bankrupt.

"I have given you a cold-blooded story of how the North Star succeeded. Its operations were on a plane with those of nearly every big enterprise in Canada to-day. Big business is war, always war—smash or be smashed. But the North Star hid behind no smug cloak of hypocrisy; it gave no quarter and it asked for none. On the other hand, the North Star lived up to its contracts to the letter; it never swindled a legitimate customer nor took advantage of a weak or struggling competitor. Its sole prey was the Gildersleeve interests and those who stood in the way of its becoming great and powerful.

V

"And now I must go back to a detail that I would much rather not have to touch upon," said Acey Smith. "But in this account of my stewardship, I promised you I should leave no mystery unexplained, and had not this little matter been attended to I would feel I had been remiss in my duty.

"Some time after the North Star enterprise had been successfully placed on its feet I had a trusted agent locate the whereabouts of Josephine Stone and her mother. He brought back a report that they were living

in Calgary, and that the death of the heiress' father had left them poorly provided for. Joseph Stone's eccentric will left no alternative in the matter of supplying funds direct from the earnings of his estate to her until she had reached her twenty-first birthday.

"How to supply you with an annuity that would provide for your livelihood and education without leaving it open to discovery where the money came from was one of the most perplexing problems of all I set out to solve. The discovery that your father had been manager of a wholesale produce concern in Edmonton before his health broke down and that he had invented a secret method for preserving eggs for indefinite periods without the use of salt finally gave me an idea. A man was sent to make your mother an offer for the recipe. Fortunately, she had preserved the formula, and she seemed only too delighted to dispose of it to the Kam City Cold Storage Company at a royalty of three thousand dollars a year. It was as much as I dared make the royalty lest—"

Josephine Stone gave a little gasp at thus suddenly learning the real source of the income she and her mother had enjoyed. "And we had thought that all came of father's genius!"

"But wait," interposed Acey Smith. "Your father's invention earned fifty times what the royalty cost each year. The Kam City Cold Storage Company is one of the flourishing subsidiaries of the North Star, and your father's recipe for storing eggs is used in it to-day. It was the recipe which actually contributed most to its success."

CHAPTER XXVII

AT THE MEETING OF THE TRAILS

I

JOSEPHINE STONE sat a rapt listener to this, the first relation of the inner story of the North Star Towing and Contracting Company's operations. She had only grasped in a dazed way the tremendous significance it had to her personally. The magnetic nearness of the master mind that had created and developed the huge enterprise and its subsidiaries single-handed diverted her thoughts for the time being from her own personal interest in the matter. Here close to her was that rare type, a man of dreams with the will and initiative to weave reality from the gossamer skeins of his picturesque imagination—a genius and a man of purpose.

The thought that struck her was: What must this man have gone through in all those years! He had not referred to that. His stress had been on the might and achievements of the North Star. But the North Star was Acey Smith; a man's greatest achievements in life are no more than the expression and embodiment of the hidden emotions that rule his being. These things must have come, not alone from the desire for revenge on his usurper, but from the irresistible urge of a great protagonist soul for self-expression—the consciousness of power—the restless fire that consumes a conqueror. What might this man not have been under other circumstances?

She glanced shyly at his face as he proceeded in low, musical tones with the tale. The bitter, sinister lines

were gone from it now, and in their place there sat the tragedy of it all; the lonely years he struggled and fought and pitted himself against the giants of his time— anonymously, because of his terrible affliction, that loon-cry, and the calamitous circumstances of his birth. About those unhappy features, she intuitively knew, he was extremely sensitive—secret sorrows that until now had been sealed books. He had dared have no sympathetic confidante and no solace in his periods of relaxation but the voice of his violin up in the solitary confines of this Cup of Nannabijou. Now—now she understood that terrible heart-hunger that had wailed to her on the notes of the number he played last night.

But there was that yet that she had not learned.

“When war broke out and Canada offered her all in the cause of civilisation,” he was saying, “I experienced the thrill that gripped the manhood of British nations round the world. I wanted to get in on a bit of the fighting, and I wanted to fight under my father’s name. I found a way.

“Instructions went out to the executives of the North Star that the directing heads of the company were called away temporarily on war duty, and Hon. J. J. Slack was put in absolute charge in the interim. A. C. Smith, superintendent, it was announced, was being despatched on confidential business and would be absent from his duties for an indefinite period, his chief assistant taking care of his work in the meantime. This all looked plausible enough because two of the North Star’s most powerful tugs had been sent overseas when the first call for boats of their type went out.

“Before I enlisted I left a sealed envelope containing explicit instructions as to the disposition of the affairs of the North Star, in case I did not return, with Sir David Edwards-Jones, president of the Regal Bank of

Canada, a man I had grown to estimate as the soul of thoroughness and honour. Those instructions were to be returned to me with the seals unbroken if I did come back. Then one night, unnoticed, I took a midnight train for the West.

"I stained my skin the copper tint it had been before old Joseph Stone bleached it with his formula, and in Vancouver enlisted as Private Alexander Carlstone. None that knew me as Acey Smith knew my name, number or battalion except Yvonne Kovenay, a rather wonderful young woman who was head of the North Star's intelligence department. I confided that much to her, under pledges of strictest secrecy, in order that I might be kept in touch with the affairs of the North Star while I was at the front.

"From what you told me that day on Amethyst Island, Miss Stone, I gather that you have heard most there was to know about the record of Alexander Carlstone with the Canadian army; except that the story as it was passed on by others gives me much more credit for deeds of valour than is coming to me. How I slipped away unnoticed from the base hospital and reverted to the rôle of Acey Smith is a little story in itself, but we have no time for those details now. The fighting was almost over and I wanted to get back to Canada as quickly as possible, lest in the process of demobilisation my identity should be learned.

"Incidentally, news had come to me that Gildersleeve was organising a new company to enter into competition with the North Star's pulpwood activities along the North Shore.

II

"Before the war, the North Star had succeeded in acquiring all the larger and more valuable timber con-

cessions on the upper reaches of Lake Superior, with the exception of the block known as the Nannabijou Limits. This vast area of pulpwood was considered the most desirable of all, and the cutting rights there meant the domination of the pulp and paper industry in Northern Ontario.

"The government had withheld the Nannabijou Limits from being thrown on the market in deference to a pledge made to the people by a former premier that it would never be leased until the company tendering for it erected a mill at Kam City capable of manufacturing into paper every stick of wood taken from it.

"The North Star until then had been an exporter, sending most of its pulpwood to mills in eastern Canada in which it held stock and to customers in United States. I had early conceived that to make the North Star hold its place it must by one means or another acquire the Nannabijou Limits. Before the war, plans were all completed for the building of a pulp and paper mill at Kam City to comply with the government stipulation. The outbreak of hostilities, however, brought about such chaos in the business world that the project had to be abandoned.

"My absence at the war and the consequent inactivity of the North Star in the matter of expansion had given Gildersleeve the opportunity he had been quietly watching for. When I returned I discovered that he was organising international capital on a large scale with the express purpose of securing the rights on the Nannabijou. If he succeeded I knew too well what it meant, and that would be the ultimate elimination of the North Star as a factor on the upper lakes.

"The North Star immediately purchased a site for a plant in Kam City, let a contract for the erection of a pulp and paper mill building and placed an order for the

necessary machinery and equipment. With these proofs of our good intentions we went to the provincial government and put in our application for cutting rights on the Nannabijou. The Kam City Pulp and Paper Company, subsidiary of the International Investment Corporation, of which Gildersleeve had been made president, simultaneously made a bid for the limits. They too bought a site in Kam City and made preparations for the erection of a mill.

"As an established Canadian company employing hundreds of workmen the year round, not to mention the lever we had in political affairs, the advantage, at the start, was with us; but parliament, as is the wont of parliaments, haggled over the matter for many weary months. Finally, they awarded the lease to the North Star, on a year to year basis, with a particular stipulation that our mills be grinding wood from the Nannabijou Limits at full capacity on October twenty-third of this year. That would give us plenty of leeway, for we expected to commence the installation of our machinery in June.

"Strange as it appeared at the time, the Kam City Pulp and Paper Company continued their building operations with no apparent prospect of limits to draw a raw supply from. I suspected Gildersleeve had a card up his sleeve, but was at a loss to determine what trickery he planned until the announcement reached us that the company in the States which was building the North Star's pulp and paper manufacturing machinery had gone into liquidation and could not make delivery.

"This was indeed a calamity, for the construction of certain of the machines used in paper-making cannot be completed in less than twenty-seven months' time. Nowhere else could we secure equipment anywhere within the time limit set by the government. The full meaning

of the coup that had been put over the North Star by its unscrupulous rival was realised when we learned that the failure of the pulp and paper machinery manufacturers with whom the North Star had its order was brought about by money-market manipulators in Gildersleeve's syndicate. By this underhand method the Kam City Pulp and Paper Mills had actually gained possession of the plant the North Star had on order.

"The North Star was faced with cancellation of its rights on the limits and possible financial difficulties through the immense amount of money it had invested in a mill that would now be a white elephant on its hands. The Kam City Pulp and Paper Company lost no time in drawing the attention of the government to the fact that the North Star was installing no machinery to grind the pulp poles it was booming at the limits; and further that we had no machinery nor any prospect of securing any. The Kam City Company applied for an order to restrain the North Star from further cutting operations and again applied for the lease under the former terms of offer.

"The order of restraint was not issued, but the government, after investigation, issued a fiat that in case the Kam City Company were in a position to manufacture paper to the full capacity demanded in the North Star's agreement, and the North Star were not in that position, the rights of the North Star on the Nannabijou Limits were to be cancelled and turned over to the Kam City Company on October twenty-third. Furthermore, the fiat ordained that the North Star could continue cutting and booming poles at the limits until that date, if it so desired; but it must make delivery of all poles cut in time and in sufficient quantities to start the Kam City Company's mills on contract time, and to keep them run-

ning full capacity until the opening of navigation the following year.

"To their own surprise, as well as that of every one else who had been following the news, the North Star's legal representatives appearing before the legislature received definite orders not to apply for an extension of time in the matter of the North Star's agreement, nor to attempt to protest the Kam City Company's right to the lease. They were instructed instead to concentrate their efforts for the inclusion of a clause in the government's agreement with the Kam City Company specifying that, should the latter company fail to make good to the letter in their contract by the date named, from any cause whatsoever, the order giving them access to the limits should be cancelled and the North Star should remain in peaceful possession with the privilege of acquiring and installing the necessary machinery at its mills as expeditiously as might be within the bounds of reason.

"That famous 'Act of God' clause, as it has since been nicknamed, was fought out for days on the floor of the House; but the North Star finally won, its representatives stressing the fact that the North Star had been arbitrarily dealt with by the government because it had been debarred from fulfilling its agreement through circumstances over which it had no control, and, what was fair for an established company already in possession, should be fair enough for an outside company which was seeking to take its right away from it. The law-makers at Toronto were sportsmen enough to see the point, though they could not possibly see how we could benefit from it.

"The public was quite as much at sea, and it was freely conceded that the directing heads of the North Star were madmen, though people who knew the North Star in-

timately were contented to wait and see what came out of it all.

III

"With the approach of the greatest crisis in the history of the North Star, another important matter claimed immediate attention. Your twenty-first birthday, Miss Stone, fell one week before cancellation of the North Star's rights on the limits must be prevented. I'll confess that when I sent you for in the name of 'J.C.X.' I saw an opportunity of thus mixing in a little more mystery to keep our rivals guessing just what we were about.

"By an odd coincidence, Norman T. Gildersleeve and your friend, Mr. Hammond, were bound for Kam City on the same train that brought you from the West. The North Star's intelligence department had been keeping close tab on Gildersleeve. So far as I can gather, he must have gained some vague notion as to the truth of the North Star's direction and control. He had been filling our camps with cheap private detectives of the transom and keyhole peeking type, some of whom were entertained to exciting adventures but gained no knowledge worth while. Gildersleeve was growing certain the North Star had some trump card to play, and he thought to take a leaf out of the North Star's book of methods to get at the bottom of it and frustrate it. He concocted a wild scheme of appearing to disappear personally and gain admission to the limits in the disguise of a preacher. He was egotistic enough to believe that what his detectives had failed in he could accomplish himself.

"Our agents kept me apprised of his every move, even to his inveigling young Hammond to undertake a seemingly mysterious mission to the limits to divert attention from his own operations. In many respects it appealed

to me as a nice bit of comedy, but Gildersleeve and Hammond were shadowed day and night; the former for obvious reasons and the latter to see that no harm befell him. Our newspapers meanwhile published all sorts of conflicting news stories of Gildersleeve's disappearance; much to the discomfiture of Gildersleeve's one confidante, a Kam City lawyer named Winch. Just by way of adding to the gaiety of nations, I wrote an editorial on the subject of aphasia, inferring that it was this trouble that had suddenly afflicted Mr. Gildersleeve and had it published in our string of dailies.

"Gildersleeve might have been allowed to play out his little fiasco to his heart's content for all the interference it would have proved to the North Star's plans had he not been rash enough to think he could spirit you away from Amethyst Island right under our eyes. The plot was to get Hammond to cultivate your acquaintance and thus unwittingly lead you into the hands of a gang of low-brows who were to carry you off in a yacht and keep you on the lake until after the twenty-third of October."

"But why should Mr. Gildersleeve have desired to carry me off?" cried Josephine Stone in perplexity.

"Because," replied Acey Smith, "he believed you were in some way essential to the plans the North Star had on foot. His first and only attempt to seize you was staged in the woods that day you made the trip up to the cliffs with Louis Hammond. It was nipped in the bud, without either you or Hammond knowing about it, by the North Star's faithful Indian trackers.

"There was no second attempt because I took no further chances. When I could not induce you to voluntarily leave the island at once, I had you carried off by Ogima Bush, the only man I could trust to handle so

delicate an undertaking. A ruse used simultaneously to implicate Gildersleeve in his disguise as the camp preacher worked so successfully that he was arrested by the Mounted Police, and his company had to forfeit a thousand dollars bail in order to get him out of jail and an extremely embarrassing situation.

"That was the beginning of the end. I went to Montreal while the Gildersleeve crowd were frantically concentrating their nimble brains to force a settlement of a strike among the North Star's tugmen. In Montreal I made final arrangements for the transfer of the estate of Joseph Stone to his rightful heiress, Josephine Stone, after having had the loan of it for the nineteen years it was left in my trust.

"There were just two little details left for me to complete when I returned. The one was to give you an account of the manner in which I managed your property while it was held in trust and the other was to see that there were no poles for the Kam City Pulp and Paper Mills to grind on the twenty-third.

"Come look!"

He led her to the edge of the cliff, pointing to the empty bay in front of the camp below.

"Oh," cried Josephine Stone, "the booms are gone. What became of them?"

"They went out last night in the freshet caused by the breaking of the beaver-dam in Solomon Creek during the storm."

"But those poles," questioned the girl, "weren't they very valuable?"

"They had not yet been paid for by the Kam City Company and they were still the North Star's property," he told her. "And they can be salvaged—but by no effort could they be salvaged to start the Kam City Company's mills on time, much less to keep them in con-

tinuous supply all winter. They *will be salvaged* to be ground and manufactured into paper at the North Star's own mills next year."

"Still the storm last night was an accident. If it had not happened—"

"I did not say it was the storm," he reminded her. "Just what made the beaver-dam go out will always remain a mystery. Ogima Bush the Medicine Man, who had led his Indians to believe the dam contained an evil spirit that was bringing misfortune to them, held some sort of a pagan incantation down there last night which might or might not explain a lot."

"The Indians told Mrs. Johnson he was killed in the storm."

"Who—Ogima? Not much. Ogima Bush has as many lives as a cat. But the chances are he'll never be seen in this locality again."

Josephine Stone turned to him. "But what about yourself?" she asked. "In your account of the North Star's operations and the final disposition of the property you have not said one word as to the provisions made for the man who engineered it all."

"Oh, that too has been taken care of," he replied. "During my trusteeship of the estate I drew a salary quite commensurate with the services I rendered. I made a few investments also that are turning out well."

"But your plans for the future?"

"I had not thought of that," Acey Smith answered, his eyes fixing in that peculiar abstraction that made him an enigma among men. "Always I have had the gift of visualising the future; of seeing clearly what was ahead of me until now. But beyond what is now accomplished, beyond to-day, everything appears like a void—a nothingness. To put it that way, I feel like one who peruses the last chapters of an exciting tale and knows,

though he has not yet seen the author's finis, that the end is near."

Something tragically prophetic in his tones, a detachment of his manner and a realisation of his terrible loneliness of spirit smote Josephine Stone. Her lips trembled and her eyes filled.

"Come, come, little girl," he chided banteringly, "you must not cry on this of all your birthdays."

But she had turned from him. "I was thinking," she murmured, "of Captain Alexander Carlstone, the Man That Might Have Been."

Her shoulders were quivering. The man's arms went out as though to sweep her exquisite little form to him, but by a tremendous effort of will he desisted and they dropped to his side. A paroxysm went through his frame and his hands went cupping to his mouth to muffle and strangle the cursed cry of the loon that was rising in his throat.

When she turned his face was the old grim, sinister mask. "Let's go," he urged almost gruffly. "I had planned to have you reach Amethyst Island early this afternoon and go over on a special tug to Kam City as soon as you could get ready. The Indians are waiting with a sedan in the bush just a few hundred yards below the water-gate."

He paused suddenly in their progress toward the pathway leading down from the summit. "My pack-sack!" he exclaimed staring at the empty place where it had hung on the little jackpine.

He strode over to the rim of the cliff and looked down. "Might have had better sense than to have hung it there," he ruminated. "Wind shook it loose and it has fallen down to the gully below. Oh, well, I'll come back up for it after I see you down to the island. I'll have to remember that."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE JUDGMENT OF THE LOWLY

I

JOSEPHINE STONE and Acey Smith descended the cliff and walked to the upper tunnel at the water-gate of the Cup of Nannabijou with scarcely a word uttered between them. There was a host of things she wanted to say to him and to ask him about, but his present mood entirely precluded it. It made her feel like a child and baffled her so that she was vexed at him and at herself.

In the tunnel he stopped to touch the secret button. As the gong sounded he looked up at it quickly.

"That's odd," he remarked, "that sort of prolonged twin-stroke. I never heard the bell ring just that way before."

When the water in the channel had disappeared he helped her down the steps.

They had progressed about half way, to the point where the channel curved and the lower tunnel should next come into view on the left, when the deep, vibrating alarum of the water-gate gong sang out again.

At his startled gasp she turned and saw racing at them a great wall of foaming, raging water. Josephine Stone screamed out of very terror of it.

"Quick!" he cried as he drew her swiftly with him. "There is one way I may save you."

She had a fleeting vision of a group of horror-stricken faces at the lower tunnel's mouth, Hammond's among them.

The tunnel and the flight of steps running up to it were but a few short paces away, but the raging, death-dealing torrent was foaming at their very heels and the tunnel's mouth was high above their reach.

Acey Smith stopped one instant. The next he seized her below the knees.

"Stiffen out!" he commanded.

As the tide of water smote them she was conscious of being thrust upward by his powerful arms, of his fingers releasing themselves from her lower limbs and of her form being catapulted unerringly through space to the mouth of the tunnel and into the arms of Louis Hammond.

All went black for the briefest space. With a supreme effort of will she warded off the fainting spell.

She, with the others, was looking with horrified fascination into the channel where the water wall had swept on and ceased to flow. On the wet rock bottom lay Acey Smith, face up, where he had been flung by the torrent that was cut off too late.

His great proud form, which a moment ago had been flexing, powerful muscles, was ominously inert, and from a corner of his mouth trickled a crimson stream.

Willing arms carried him up the stone steps, through the tunnel and out into the open. There they laid him gently upon the sward.

The girl bent over him her hand feeling for his heart-beats as she tenderly wiped the blood-stains from his mouth and cheek, Hammond silently kneeling beside her.

At her touch Acey Smith's eyes fluttered and there came a wan smile of recognition as he looked from the girl's face to Hammond's.

Tremblingly, he groped for a hand of each and brought them together over his breast.

"Tell Sandy Macdougall," he whispered weakly, "to

come up and get my packsack. I could have wished—to have lived—to kiss the bride.”

The heart of Josephine Stone was too full for words. Silently, she stooped and pressed her warm lips to his chilling ones. With scarcely a tremor the light left his face and he was very still.

The spark that had been a man had fled.

II

Sandy Macdougall, who, by the way, afterwards discovered he was the main beneficiary in Acey Smith's will, insisted on going up alone to recover the packsack of the Big Boss. What he found it to contain he told to no living being, but those contents threw a light on another weird phase of the protagonist soul of the Timber Pirate. In the pack, neatly parcelled, were: a suit of coloured blanket-cloth trimmed with buck-skin lacing, a pair of beaded shoe-packs, necklaces of wolves' teeth, a wig of long, coarse black hair with a purple band around its crown holding a single eagle's feather at the back, a bottle of stain that dyed the skin a copper hue, a stick of blood-red grease-paint and a solution for quickly washing the stain and the grease-paint from the face and hands.

Acey Smith who had been Alexander Carlstone was also Ogima Bush the Medicine Man!

III

They buried Acey Smith on the crown of one of his native hills where trails fork to the cardinal points of the compass into the wild scenic grandeur he loved and called his home. There the shore-wash of the great lake is within ear-shot on the one side, while to the other the fantastic Laurentian ranges forever lift their scarred

and battered breasts to heaven as if in mute testimony to the travail of man below.

On the mound above his resting-place the Indians set up a great totem-pole bearing graven images and painted faces relating his merits and his deeds, and on it they gave place for an epitaph from the white workers of his camps and boats.

Because none knew of any faith he held to there was no religious ceremony; but a little later there came a strange company to pay last respects to one who had proved their friend in the hours of dire need. There were aged ones, lame men and blind men—and with them was a woman; she whose daughter was a Mary Magdalene and had been snatched from the burning by the strange, whimsical man that was gone. They brought with them a few cheap wreaths as tributes of their regard; and, noting the absence of Christian emblems, these simple people made of birch boughs a little white cross which they planted in the centre of the grave in soil hallowed by their tears.

The following year Mrs. Josephine Hammond, accompanied by her husband, paid a visit to the grave to give instructions for the placing of a more substantial and appropriate monument there to the memory of Captain Alexander Carlstone, V.C. They found that the wind and the sun had riven the great totem-pole, and the frost had heaved its base so that it fell to one side.

But the little white birch cross of Christ's poor remained firm in its place, where, in the evening shadow, it gleamed steadfastly like the good that endures when might and genius have passed away.

JUL 4 1908

